

From Cancer Coach Patricia Barrett-Robillard:

Strategies to Improve Memory and Concentration

Many of us, as we go through normal aging, experience menopause or cope with stressful life events notice increasing challenges with memory and concentration. For those who have had a cancer diagnosis, what we call Cancer-Related Brain Fog is one of the top three concerns of people experiencing cancer. (the others are fatigue and fear of recurrence).

Symptoms of Brain Fog can include difficulty with:

- maintaining attention, concentrating, focusing on or completing tasks
- remembering things, including details like names and dates
- multi-tasking
- keeping your train of thought while talking
- math, organizational, and language skills. This includes tasks such as not being able to organize thoughts, find the right word during a conversation, or balance a checkbook
- coordination and balance
- changes in mood, self esteem and self confidence

Even small changes to your brain functioning can have a big impact on your quality of life.

THERE IS HOPE!

Strategies that improve memory and concentration for everyone including those with cancer-related brain fog include:

Avoid multitasking and practice being more present-minded. Try to focus on one task at a time and complete it before starting another one whenever possible. Regular meditation has been shown to improve mood and decrease stress. Going for a walk in nature, listening to music, doing activities you enjoy all can help you relax and decrease brain fatigue.

Use memory aids and devices to help you remember things and keep you on track. Using kitchen/oven timers, the timer on your cell phone, etc. will help keep you on track and prevent frustrating mistakes. Regular use of calendars and lists will make sure you remember things. Using your smart phone to take a picture of things you need to remember like where you parked your car will decrease your stress. All of these memory aids will save space in your brain to help you better concentrate on the tasks you need to do.

Create regular routines and habits. The more automatic we can make tasks, the less strain on our brain! Have a place by the door for your cell phone, keys, purse, wallet, etc. and always put those things there when you get home. Attach new things you need to remember such as a new medication to an already established routine, such as your morning coffee, brushing your teeth, etc.

Planning and organizing your day. Set yourself up for success! The more you can plan for ahead of time, the less pressure and stress you will feel. Take time the night before to go over your next day, review anything you need to bring with you, missing information you still need, such as directions, parking instructions, etc. Act on any thoughts you have for example if you remember you need to bring an item with you, take 30 seconds to put it in the car or by the door.

A healthy lifestyle can improve thinking abilities. Physical exercise helps the body, mind and brain. It improves cognitive functioning and helps overall mood. Eating healthy foods helps with maintaining physical and mental well-being. Getting enough sleep and feeling well-rested will make it easier to concentrate, learn, and remember.

For those with a cancer diagnosis:

Tell our loved ones and your employer what you are going through. Tell your family, so that they'll understand if you forget things you normally wouldn't forget. They may be able to help and encourage you. Talk with your employer if you are having problems at work. Discuss ways your employer could support you, such as changing your workload or deadlines. For more information go to <https://www.cancerandwork.ca/>

Coping with brain fog can be an unexpected and challenging side effect of a diagnosis of cancer. You do not have to manage this on your own. Cancer coaches can work with you to develop a personalized plan to decrease your brain fog and improve your quality of life. ***I am available every Friday at Beyond Yoga of one-to one coaching.*** Twice a year, we also offer **Maximum Capacity's Coping with Brain Fog** 8 week program at our Maplesoft Centre. **Go to www.ottawacancer.ca to register for Cancer Coaching or for more information.**

References:

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