

## Cognitive Changes During and After Cancer Treatment

You may notice changes in memory or focus during or after your cancer treatment. This is sometimes called “chemo brain.” This can happen even if you did not get chemotherapy. There are many things that may affect how the brain works during or after your treatment.

- The cancer itself
- Chemotherapy drugs
- Other drugs for your treatment, such as corticosteroids, anti-nausea medicines, anesthesia, or pain medicines
- Low blood counts
- Trouble sleeping
- Infection
- Fatigue
- Hormone changes or hormone treatments
- Other illness such as diabetes or high blood pressure
- Nutrition
- Older age
- Depression, anxiety
- Stress

### Managing Cognitive Changes

If your cognitive changes are caused by a treatable issue like infection, low blood counts or nutrition, your doctor may order medicines or blood products to help. If it is caused by your cancer or treatment, there may be no clear treatment. There are still

things you can do to cope with the symptoms.

- Work less
- Do one thing at a time
- Make lists
- Get plenty of rest and sleep
- Make checklists or daily reminders
- Color-code and label items
- Exercise your brain: take a class, do crossword puzzles, Sudoku, number or word games, or electronic games
- Get regular exercise
- Do activities that help you relax
- Eat a balanced diet
- Set up and follow routines
- Pick one place to put items that are often lost and **always** put them there

Ask for help if you need it. Friends and loved ones may not know how to help you. Have them help with routine chores. This may cut down on distractions and help you save mental energy.

Talk about these changes with your family, friends, and your health care team. Most people get better over time. You may be able to control and manage your symptoms until they improve or go away. If you have concerns about any of the changes you’re having, please contact your health care team.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 12/2020 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7709