

Thinking and Memory Changes During Cancer Treatment

Changes in the way you think can happen during cancer treatment. This factsheet tells about these changes and ways to help manage them.

What are these changes?

You may find it harder to do these things during your cancer treatment:

- Think fast
- Pay attention
- Find the right words
- Do more than one thing at a time
- Remember things
- Learn new things

Sometimes the changes can last for months after your cancer treatment is over.

Talk with your care team if the changes make it hard for you to do these things:

- Take care of yourself
- Take care of your family
- Do your work

Also talk with your care team if the changes get worse over time. They may need to do tests or give you medicines that help.

Think about joining a support group for people with cancer. Talking with others who have gone through these changes may help you.

What can I do about these changes?

Get organized.

- Keep a record of important dates and tasks. You can use a planner, calendar, or cell phone app. Record these types of things:
 - To-do lists
 - Times and locations of appointments
 - Phone numbers
 - Names and descriptions of people you want to remember
- Decide which tasks are most important and do them first.

- Take time every day to update your lists. Cross things off when you finish them.
- Ask other people for help.
- Break big tasks into smaller parts. Take breaks when you feel tired or lose focus.
- Set alarms on your phone or computer to remind you when to do things on your list. You can also set alarms to remind you when it is time to take your medicines.
 - If you don't have a cell phone or computer, write down your daily routine. Post it in a place you will see it often such as the refrigerator or bathroom mirror.
- Pick a certain place to keep things you use a lot such as your car keys or glasses.

Train yourself to focus.

- When people tell you things, write them down. Then repeat them back out loud.
- When you read things, underline or use a highlighter to mark important information.
- Make mental pictures of what you need to remember.
- Keep a quiet, tidy space to do work and talk with others.
- Learn the thoughts or emotions that distract you from what you want to do. Attend to them before starting your activity. When these thoughts come into your head, notice them and then return to your work.

Take care of your brain.

- Keep your mind active with puzzles, reading, or a new hobby that interests you.
- Do these things to keep your memory working at its best:
 - Exercise
 - Eat well
 - Get plenty of sleep
 - Reduce stress with meditation or guided imagery. The social worker on your care team can help you learn these methods.