

Management of Cancer-Related Cognitive Impairment

- Cognitive changes can occur before, during, or after cancer treatment
- Often associated with chemotherapy, but other forms of cancer treatment can cause cognitive issues
- Attention, memory, & executive function are commonly affected
- May experience difficulty concentrating, remembering, learning new things, multitasking, word finding, slow & disorganized thinking, etc.
- Can impact all aspects of one's life & valued roles: work, socialization, financial management, daily tasks, etc.



Self-Monitoring

- Important to be aware of situations your cognitive issues are worse
- Make note of the situations you experience cognitive problems
 - What precipitated the issue
 - Time of day
 - Other side effects experienced
 - Environment it occurred in
- Learn "at risk" situations can help you plan & manage accordingly
- Gives doctor an objective look at the cognitive issues you experience

Management Strategies

- Plan/ Prioritize
 - Do tasks that require the highest concentration/ mental abilities at times you feel the best cognitively
- Follow regular schedule/routine
- Avoid multitasking
- Manage other factors that may contribute to cognitive difficulties (stress, fatigue, sleep issues, etc.)
- Ask for help when needed- to conserve mental (& physical) energy

Internal Strategies

- Visual imagery: make a mental picture of what you're trying to remember
- Rehearsal: repeat information out loud or to oneself
- Chunking: organize parts of information into smaller groups
- Mnemonics: attaching letters, word associations, etc. to remember something

External Strategies

- Reminders
 - Use phone app to set reminders of appointments, tasks, etc.
 - Use sticky notes throughout home
 - Make checklists for tasks to remember items needed, steps, etc.
 - Set recurring alarms on phone for ongoing reminders
- Keep a memory notebook with important information to refer back to
- Keep notepad & pen or phone notes app with you at all times so you can easily jot down information to remember
- Daily Planners/Organizers
 - Write down the activities/tasks for that day
 - Create alarms that will prompt your reference
 - Can use physical planner or phone apps
- Keep physical calendar in location of easy reference at start of day

Environmental/Task Modifications

- Eliminate distractions in environment
 - Minimize noise, reduce visual distractions
- Avoid busy environments- can add cognitive stress
- Determine specific spot for items often lost- have a place for everything
- Put items in specific spots so you see them when needing to use them (items needed to take out the door, put them by the door)
- Use visuals to remember
 - Make todo list & put it by bedside to reference at start of day
 - Grocery list on refrigerator
- Use medication organizer & visual chart to record medication taken
- Simplify task
 - Write down steps before starting task
 - Break it down into smaller steps & take rest breaks

Cognitive Training

- Cognitive exercises may be used to retrain & practice cognitive skills
- Evidence-based online training programs:
 - <https://www.brainhq.com>
 - <https://www.happyneuronpro.com>
- Practicing 1 cognitive task over & over isn't as beneficial as engaging in a variety of different cognitively stimulating activities of increasing difficulty
- Being good at 1 cognitive task doesn't necessarily translate into improvements in functional performance
- Consider learning something new

Exercise

- Exercise forms of aerobic, yoga, walking, etc. have been found beneficial in improving cognitive impairment
- Individuals who engaged in more physical activity, were found to have a shorter duration of time with cancer-related cognitive complaints

****Talk to your doctor prior to engaging in any form of exercise****

Meditation

- Meditation practices have been associated with neurological modulation in cognitive processes of working memory & attention
- Relaxation & stress reduction may regulate immune function which is thought to be involved in cancer-related cognitive impairment
- Improved subjective cognitive function: short-term memory, verbal memory, & processing speed
- Guided Meditation offered at Gilda's Club- 1st Tues of every month
- Ongoing mindfulness meditation classes offered at Turning Point

**Contact OT Student, Katie Henderson,
for individualized support managing
cancer-related cognitive changes
intern@gildasclubkc.org**

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