



**SURVIVORSHIP &  
SUPPORTIVE CARE  
INSTITUTE**



# Cognitive Concerns after Cancer

## Cancer Related Cognitive Impairment

### What is it?

Cancer-related cognitive impairment (CRCI), sometimes called chemo brain, is experiencing new or worsening problems in memory, attention, thinking, and learning. Some examples are difficulties with: Foggy thinking (or brain fog), word finding, multi-tasking and remembering things.

### What causes it?

There are studies have pointed to several causes including the cancer itself and the effects of cancer treatment. Sometimes factors like a personal history of other medical problems, unmanaged depression or anxiety, older age, and certain lifestyle habits (smoking, poor sleep, or diet) can increase risk.

### Why does it matter?

CRCI impacts a person's quality of life and makes daily activities like school, work, and social activities more mentally fatiguing. This can be especially hard for patients with young children or demanding jobs.

### Does it go away on its own?

Most patients notice the most bothersome symptoms during their treatment. Many recover within a few months after treatment ends. For those in longer term treatment, symptoms may continue for several months to several years although there may be gradual improvement.

### What can I do about it?

Talk to your oncology provider about your concerns. They will ask you questions and can assist with problems that may make CRCI worse such as poor sleep quality and pain.

Your provider may refer you to the psycho-oncology team at **Cancer Survivorship and Supportive Care Institute**. Our team of psychiatrists and psychologists can assess your thinking and memory and might request labs and imaging of your brain. They will offer a comprehensive treatment plan to help with attention, fatigue or mood related concerns, and evidence-based cognitive rehabilitation options.

Two examples of cognitive rehabilitation used are:

**Computerized Cognitive Training (CCT)** - software or online programs that use games to progressively train your memory, attention, or daily living skills.

**Compensatory Strategies** - focus on teaching practical strategies to work around challenges.

Here are some things you can do at home to help manage cancer-related cognitive impairment:

- Get adequate **sleep** at night and rest during the day.
- **Exercise** regularly to improve focus and reduce feelings of fatigue and stress.
- **Eat healthy meals.**





**SURVIVORSHIP &  
SUPPORTIVE CARE  
INSTITUTE**



- **Engage in mindfulness.**
- **Manage your stress** and get treatment for significant anxiety and depression symptoms.
- **Stay mentally active** with word games, puzzles or starting a new hobby.
- When doing important tasks, **minimize distractions** that may interfere.
- **Write down things you want to remember.**
- **Keep a calendar** and use it for appointment tracking.

You can receive support for many of these lifestyle and behavioral changes at the Cancer Survivorship and Supportive Care Institute. Evidence-based supports such as art therapy, music therapy, massage, nutritional services, spiritual care, psychiatric and psychological services, yoga therapy, exercise oncology and acupuncture are available, and most are free of charge. Call (305) 243-4129 or visit the Sylvester Patient & Families Cancer Supportive Care Page for more information.