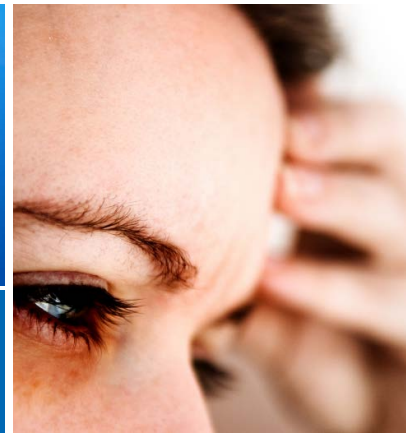


Brain fog



This problem affects your cognitive abilities. This sheet:

- Explains what brain fog is
- Gives you tips on how to better manage it

What is brain fog?

It's when your cognitive abilities (your ability to retain and understand information, pay attention, and remember things) aren't functioning well. You feel as if you can't think as clearly as usual.

What are the symptoms?

They're different from one person to another. Here are the most common:

- difficulty concentrating
- difficulty learning new information and remembering it
- difficulty multitasking, and feeling overwhelmed when this happens
- difficulty finding words
- difficulty in doing mental arithmetic
- needing more time to do everyday tasks



These symptoms may be more severe if you're tired or stressed. They can also be worse in the days following your cancer treatments. It's difficult to live with. But don't worry. Your memories, skills, and abilities are still there. They haven't disappeared.

What causes this problem?

It can be caused by your medical condition or one of your treatments. Some possible causes are:

- long COVID
- cancer treatment (chemotherapy, hormone therapy, etc.)
- various syndromes (such as chronic fatigue syndrome, other painful syndromes, lupus).
- hormonal changes or disorders (e.g., menopause, hypothyroidism).
- psychological disorders, such as anxiety or depression
- sleep disorders (such as insomnia, hypersomnia)

Does brain fog ever go away?

In most patients treated for cancer, symptoms diminish within 9 to 12 months after the end of treatment. Some people may have effects for longer, but that isn't common.

For long COVID, brain fog often increases in the first few months after a COVID-19 infection. Then it becomes stable and decreases a little in the months that follow. However, some patients have longer-term symptoms.

For the other causes, it varies greatly. Talk to your care team. They'll give you an idea of how long it could last depending on your situation.

What influences brain fog?

Certain situations are known to have an effect on brain fog, such as your lifestyle:

- not getting enough sleep
- not eating a balanced diet
- not drinking enough
- being stressed or anxious

These factors can act alone or together. This is why some people have more severe brain fog than others.



What consequences can brain fog have?

It can have a big impact on everyday life.

- **Work:** Makes it difficult to return to work or resume work tasks.
- **Health:** Makes you forget your medical appointments, medications you need to take, or instructions to be followed at home.
- **Everyday tasks:** Things become more difficult and it takes more time for you to cook or run errands, for example.
- **Quality of life:** Makes you feel stressed, frustrated, and unable to make sense of the difficulties you're having.
- **Social life:** Makes you want to avoid others because you have trouble following conversations, feel tired, or forget things.

However, you can still take action to improve your situation. See the tables in the Appendix on page 3.

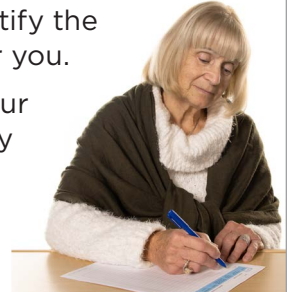
You can also be followed by health professionals (e.g., occupational therapist, psychologist, neuropsychologist).

What else can I do to take care of myself?

Monitor your symptoms

This helps you to see if your situation is improving. It also helps you identify the actions that are working best for you.

- Write down any changes in your memory, concentration, or way of speaking.
- Write down the difficulties you're having in your day-to-day life.



Ask for help from your loved ones

Your family and friends are often the first to see changes. Ask them to tell you about any changes they see in you.

Consult your doctor

- Tell your doctor if your symptoms are getting worse or getting in the way of your day-to-day life.
- Show the doctor your notes to better explain your difficulties.

Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

If you have any questions, contact a member of your care team.



USEFUL RESOURCES

Long Covid website

santemonteregie.qc.ca/en/west

Click on COVID-19, What you need to know → Half-way down the page, click on Long COVID

Other CHUM health fact sheets are available. Ask your care team which fact sheets can help you.



You can also read them online.
chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante

Follow the advice in the following tables to avoid new symptoms and better manage those that are already present.

How to avoid brain fog	
Stimulate your brain	• Read, write, learn new things to keep your mind active (examples: try new recipes or activities, learn a language). • Engage in leisure activities and games (crossword puzzles, sudoku, jigsaw puzzles, card or board games). • Engage in social activities (e.g., call or have coffee with a friend, join a book club). 
Avoid asking too much of your brain	• Listen to your body and respect your rhythm. • Take regular breaks throughout the day.
Have a healthy lifestyle	• Maintain regular sleep (go to bed and get up at set times). See the fact sheet Coping with fatigue related to cancer and treatments. • Eat a balanced diet: eat fish rich in omega-3 (salmon, tuna, mackerel, herring, sardines, anchovies), nuts, fruits and vegetables rich in antioxidants (such as broccoli, peppers, spinach, strawberries, apples, citrus fruits, tomatoes). • Drink water regularly to stay hydrated. • Engage in physical activity as much as you can. See the health sheet Staying active during cancer treatments. • Practice meditation, relaxation, or deep breathing. See the health sheet Relaxation for better stress management. • Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. 

How to **reduce** brain fog symptoms

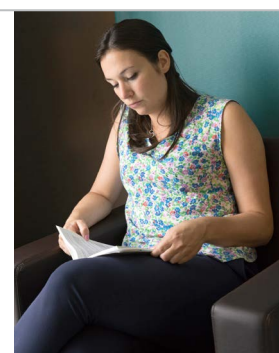
Organize your days

- Use an agenda, calendar, or mobile app to keep track of appointments and activities.
- Set alarms or reminders (for example, a timer when preparing meals, alarms for taking medications).
- Follow a routine with activities at fixed times (such as eating breakfast and going for a walk at the same time every day).
- Plan important activities when you feel fewer symptoms of brain fog.
- Record voice notes on your phone or send emails to yourself.
- Make a written summary of a conversation or medical appointment to remember it better.
- Focus on one task at a time and avoid doing several at the same time.



Create a supportive environment

- Use a storage system (e.g. always put your keys in the same place).
- Work or read in a quiet place where there are no distractions.
- Use visual reminders (such as Post-it notes on the fridge for important things).



Have a healthy lifestyle

- See page 3

Ask for support

- Don't hesitate to ask for help from those around you (such as reminding you about appointments, going with you to them).
- The Quebec Cancer Foundation provides a list of resources: home help, accommodation, transportation, support, etc. cancerquebec.ca/en.

For more advice on cancer-related brain fog, watch these videos:

[The essentials to know](#) and [Daily strategies](#).

[Youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

In the search bar, type Chumontreal brain fog

The content of this document in no way replaces the advice of your healthcare professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
chumontreal.qc.ca