

Massachusetts General Hospital BMT Survivorship Program

Tips for Managing Memory Changes

Cognition refers to how we think and learn new knowledge. It involves memory, perception, language, attention, reasoning and problem solving. Cancer treatment can cause changes to a person's cognition. Research is on-going to learn more about why this happens. Most cognitive effects are better a year after BMT. However, some patients report symptoms at 5 years or more.

BMT patients often report: forgetfulness, problems with organization, mental foginess, trouble concentrating and multi-tasking, as well as name and word finding problems.

Other treatable factors which may affect cognition after BMT: mood disorders, stress, anemia, thyroid or diabetes disorders, infection, pain, fatigue, sleep disorders, poor nutrition, hormonal changes and medication side effects.

Talk to your BMT care team if you have cognitive concerns. We can help you with a plan that is right for you. This can include medication, referrals to specialists or physical therapy. We will tell you if you need neuropsychological testing, which examines your brain function.

What can I do to try to make my memory better?

When trying to learn new information:

- Write down the information or say it out loud
- Repeat back medication changes, during medical visits or on the telephone
- Repeat back important information you need to remember in conversations

Find a central location to make lists and take notes on important information

- A note book with sub-sections may be helpful to record information on different medical problems
- In the same note book find a place for one to-do list, you remain organized and as items are completed your accomplishments are reinforced
- Consider using technology to organize notes and to-do list, this can also be shared easily

Establish a Routine at home:

- Place keys, phone and wallet or purse in the same place always
- Find a common place for your watch, glasses, shoes, and jackets
- Park your car in the same place at the store or at appointments
- Use reminders (daily alarm set for 10 am and 10 pm) to take meds or to complete a daily task

(continued on back)

You should also:

- Exercise regularly
- Get plenty of sleep
- Remain active with family and friends
- Read or play games
- Eat healthy and do not drink a lot of alcohol
- Think about a free visit with our BMT social worker. Social workers can help you with any anxiety or depression that you may have.

Mass General Resources

Physical Therapy

Available as one-time consult or recurring visit

617-726-2961

Lifestyle Medicine Clinic for Cancer Patients

Individualized exercise and lifestyle interventions to improve quality of life

617-724-4000

BMT Social Workers

617-726-5765