THE “F” WORDS
Facing Fatigue and Brain Fog

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Cure leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease and myeloma, and improve the quality of life of patients and their families.
LLSC offers support throughout a patient’s journey.
35 Research projects (2018)

Approx. $40 M since 1955
SPEAKER

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REFLECT FOR A MOMENT
THE PRESENTATION

- We’ll discuss some of the big *F words* in cancer care and treatment
  - To better understand cancer-related fatigue
  - To learn how to manage fatigue in day-to-day life
  - To have caregivers understand their role in supporting fatigue management
  - To acknowledge the validity of brain fog as a real symptom related to cancer and treatment
  - To learn self management techniques that may help to improve brain fog
  - To advocate for acknowledgement and further research to be done in the areas of fatigue and brain fog
FATIGUE
Fatigue is the general lack of energy, tiredness or exhaustion. It is different from the tiredness a person usually feels at the end of the day. Fatigue is not necessarily related to activity, and may not go away with rest or sleep.

- (Cancer.ca)
WHAT DOES CANCER-RELATED FATIGUE LOOK LIKE?
WHAT DOES CANCER-RELATED FATIGUE LOOK LIKE?

- You feel more tired than usual during your daily activities
- You can’t concentrate
- You feel tired and it’s not even related to an activity
- You have trouble remembering things
- You put less effort into your appearance
- You have trouble sleeping

- You are too tired to do the things that you normally do
- Your arms and legs feel heavy and hard to move
- You spend more time in bed/sleeping
- You feel sad, depressed, or irritable
- You feel frustrated with yourself and others
- You stay in bed for more than 24h
CANCER-RELATED FATIGUE CAN...

- Differ from one day to the next in how bad it is and how much it bothers you
- Be overwhelming and make it hard for you to feel well
- Make it hard for you to be with your friends and family
- Make it hard for you to do things you normally do, including going to work
- Make it harder for you to follow your cancer treatment plan
WHY DOES THIS FATIGUE HAPPEN?

• Multi-factoral
  • Cancer disease itself
  • Cancer treatments ie. Chemotherapy, biotherapies, hormonal therapies, radiation, surgery
  • Chemical changes in body
  • Increased stress
  • Change in sleep patterns
  • Decreased movement ie. Physical activity/exercise
  • Altered nutrition
  • Change in mood
HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

- Cancer related fatigue can start with the disease itself
- It can last during treatment and often worsens the further into treatment a person is
  - especially with combination therapies such as chemo with radiation, surgery, or transplant
- It may last for several months or years after treatment depending on the severity
- For most it will start to improve within a couple of months after treatment is complete
There is GOOD NEWS

There are things that you can do to help manage your fatigue!
FATIGUE MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

- Exercise regularly – it takes energy to make energy
- Keep a journal of how you are feeling each day
- Plan ahead
- Use tools to help you conserve your energy
- Let others help you with tasks that need doing
- Save your energy for things that you enjoy doing

- Balance activity with rest
- One short nap
- Maintain good sleep hygiene
- Eat nutritious energy dense foods
- Talk to your healthcare providers
TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS

- Encourage physical activity
- Be aware of your loved one’s limitations
- Offer to help with day to day tasks so that they can save energy for what they love to do
- Help in planning activities to balance rest with activity
- Encourage good sleep hygiene/routines
- Allow them to express their frustrations and don’t try and fix it
BRAIN FOG
WHAT IS BRAIN FOG

Terms you may hear

- Chemo brain, chemo fog, brain fog, cognitive impairment, cancer related cognitive dysfunction

Brain fog is a relatively newly recognized concept

- Changes in thinking, memory, learning, processing and attention, following cancer diagnosis and/or treatment with chemotherapy

- Can be a sudden onset or gradual, may come and go
WHAT CAUSES BRAIN FOG?

Chemotherapy is not the only cause of “chemo brain”

- Radiation, surgery, stem cell transplants, immunotherapy, hormone therapy, fatigue, disease involving brain, nutritional deficiencies etc.

Scientific reasoning

- stress on the body triggers inflammation
- Inflammatory chemicals cross into brain (cytokines)
- causes stress on healthy brain cells
- damages cells that help brain cells heal
- impaired brain function
VERY COMPLEX PROCESS
WHAT DOES BRAIN FOG LOOK LIKE?

Why do I have a string on my finger?

The curse of forgetfulness.
Many patients experience difficulty with:

- Short-term memory
- Multi-tasking
- Complex problem solving
- Concentration
- Mental efficiency
- Word finding
- Fine motor skills

These changes can be subtle and variable.
HOW COMMON IS IT?

- Research estimates range from 15-95% of patients
- Can depend on a range of factors
  - Type and dose of treatment
  - Medication side effects
  - Emotional distress
  - Symptom burden
  - Co-morbidities
WILL THIS EVER GO AWAY?

- Majority of patients report symptoms fade or resolve over time
- Small number of patients that still experience long term cognitive impairments
Common challenges in:
- Fulfillment of social roles and responsibilities
- Enjoyment of daily activities
- Returning to work
- Self esteem
- Relationships
- Adherence to health regimens
“You have to fight to make yourself remember numbers, words, places that you go. Sometimes I would leave the house to go somewhere and I really couldn’t remember how to get there...it almost made me break down because of the fact that you think you’re losing your mind.”

Boykoff et al.. (2009)
Chemotherapy Fog Is No Longer Ignored as Illusion

By JANE GROSS  APRIL 29, 2007
WHAT RESEARCH IS TELLING US

- There may be factors that predispose certain patients to chemo brain, making it worse for them than others
- Cancer itself may contribute to cognitive impairments
- There are currently no therapies that are the standard of care to help with brain fog, but some are being studied
  - Methylphenidate and modafenil (neurostimulant)
  - Donepezil (used for Alzheimer’s and dementia)
- More research is needed to develop reliable tools to predict risk factors and assess for brain fog, and improve prevention and treatments
SELF-MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- Exercise your brain
- Taking notes
- Using a calendar
- Smart phones
- Plan ahead
- Eliminate clutter
- Have emergency info and contacts on you
- Follow routines/avoid multitasking
- Speaking with healthcare team
PROMOTING OVERALL HEALTH

- Adequate rest
- Physical activity +/- being outdoors
- Being open to social support
- Maintain adequate nutrition
- Engaging in mentally stimulating activities
FOR CAREGIVERS & SUPPORTERS

- Encourage your loved one to tell you what is going on with their cognitive abilities
- Help with self management strategies
- Help to maintain loved one’s independence, help when needed/asked
- Go with patients to doctors appointments and meetings
- Increase awareness of chemo brain/brain fog to others
Fatigue is often the most distressing cancer and treatment symptom.

It is influenced by many different factors, both physiological as well as psychosocial.

It can range from mild to severe and is ever changing throughout one’s cancer journey.

There are many management techniques that can help a person cope with cancer related fatigue.
SUMMARY

- Changes in cognitive functioning are commonly experienced after cancer treatment.

- These changes are often subtle but can have significant impacts for patients and families.

- Cognitive functioning can be influenced by a wide range of factors.

- There are self management strategies that you can use to help cope with, and manage your cognitive challenges.

- More research is needed to support determining risk factors, prevention and treatment strategies.
REFERENCES


REFERENCES

The impact and management of cancer-related fatigue on patients and families. CONJ. doi: 10.5737/1181912x114192198


REFERENCES


WE CAN HELP

LLSCANADA.ORG

Watch all of our webcasts on our website!