

*Living Well With
Brain Cancer*

Boost Your Brain Power



Many people find it difficult to focus and think clearly during treatment. Below are some helpful strategies to help improve your brain health.

- **Stay physically active.** Exercise is not only a good way to stay physically fit, but it is also great for your brain and mood. Physical activity can improve thinking speed, memory, learning and executive functioning skills, as well as helping grow new brain cells in the process. Additionally, being physically fit can reduce stress. It doesn't have to be much, just 20 minutes of low to moderate intensity exercise (e.g. walking, tai chi, bike riding, stretching, etc.) a couple of times a week can make a difference.
- **Stay mentally active.** Exercising the mind helps to protect and improve cognitive function. Engaging in activities that are intellectually stimulating such as arts and crafts, journaling, playing games, reading, and learning can promote new brain cell growth and improve your brains' functioning.
- **Stay busy with things you love to do.** Amidst the flurry of diagnostic tests, procedures, and treatments, it can be difficult to remember and enjoy one's passions and hobbies. Keeping busy with things you love to do can reduce stress and keep your mind sharp. Whether it be taking a walk to enjoy nature, calling a friend, or pursuing a new passion or hobby, do things that truly bring you joy and happiness.
- **Stay connected.** Spending time with others, engaging in stimulating conversation, and staying in touch and connected with family and friends are good for your brain health. Phone calls, videoconferencing, email, and social media can help maintain connections with others and promote brain functioning. Supporting others can also help foster a sense of purpose. Staying connected and spending time in nature has also shown to improve cognitive function, mood, and overall well-being. Taking nature walks, visiting meditation gardens, and engaging in outdoor activities are just a few ways to stay connected to nature.

- **Stay positive and stay relaxed.** Negative thoughts and stress are the mind's worst enemies. Keeping stress in check and maintaining a positive outlook can boost your brain health and mood. Meditating, deep breathing, playing uplifting music, watching an inspiring movie, and setting realistic expectations for yourself are just a few ways to help your mind wind down and stay positive.
- **Stay healthy.** Lifestyle factors such as poor diet and risky alcohol consumption can have a negative influence on a person's cognition. Eating a well-balanced and nutritious diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats (e.g. olive oil, nuts, fish) has been shown to protect and improve cognitive function and keep the immune system healthy. Heavy alcohol consumption is harmful for the brain and increases risk for cognitive impairment. Aim to abstain from alcohol or limit drinking to 2 drinks per day or less for adult men and 1 drink or less per day for adult women.
- **Stay well-rested.** Getting plenty of sleep is really important for learning and memory. The average adult requires 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night. Skimping on a few hours or oversleeping can be problematic for your emotional and cognitive health. Keeping up with a consistent sleep schedule, even on weekends, will help you fall asleep and wake up more easily. Napping is a good way to make up for lost sleep, however, napping for too long can make it difficult to fall asleep or stay asleep at night. Keeping naps short to just 10 to 20 minutes can help avoid these problems.
- **Stay on a schedule.** People often feel more 'brain fog' when they don't have a good daily routine. Sticking to a daily schedule can also add purpose and focus to your day, as well as reduce the demands placed on your memory. Consider using a planner and alarms to keep you on track as you are trying out your new routine. Also, try creating a to-do list and mark off items as you go along to track your hard work!
- **Avoid sensory and information overload.** Too many distractions can overstimulate the brain and make it harder for one to stay focused and think clearly. To help stay focused for longer periods of time, try and reduce background noises (e.g. turning off nearby TV/radio), holding conversations in a quiet area, asking people to speak one at a time, and taking periodic breaks during the day to relax.