

Living Well After Brain Cancer Treatment Education Series

Managing Attention and Concentration



While changes to attention and concentration can be frustrating, there are strategies that will help. Consider one or all of the approaches listed here:

- **Attend to cognitive fatigue first.** You will be able to concentrate much better when you are not fatigued. If you don't have time for a full nap, try a 'brain break' of closing your eyes and shutting off sounds for a few minutes.
- **Manage distraction.** Unnecessary sensory input can pull your attention away to something else before you have a chance to complete what you were doing. Reduce potential distractions by turning off TV/radio/email notifications, pulling down blinds/curtains, repositioning your work desk, closing down unneeded computer programs, using 'focus' features on devices, blocking internet pop-up messages, etc.
- **Do one thing at a time and switch between tasks more slowly.** Many people find that they are more effective at doing one thing at a time rather than multitasking. Also, consider building in more time to transition between tasks.
- **Notice instances when concentration is most difficult and/or especially focused.** If you are aware of the circumstances around when your concentration is either strong or vulnerable, you can use this information to build a strategy to fill the gap. Consider getting input from loved ones to find creative solutions.
- **Talk through steps aloud as you do them.** Talking aloud through the steps of a task while you do them helps to keep you on track and focused (i.e., "I'm going upstairs to find my glasses; I'm looking for my glasses" etc.).
- For complex tasks requiring multiple steps, **break down into smaller steps**, write them out, then check off once completed.
- **Use a 'focusing' phrase.** If you feel you are losing concentration have a phrase (i.e., "stay on track") to return your attention to the task at hand.

After brain tumor treatment, many people find they have more difficulty focusing on the task at hand. Some of this may resolve on its own over time as the brain re-adjusts after treatment. Yet some of it may be the 'new normal' going forward. Consider trying these strategies to help manage and improve your attention and concentration.



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- Sometimes stress/anxiety/worry can get in the way.** You can lessen the impact by using **STOP-FOCUS-RETURN**: Notice as soon as you can when you are distracted (STOP), put your full attention on your breath (FOCUS) to clear your mind, and then return to your intended task (RETURN). Also, consider stress buster strategies such as journaling, talking to someone for support and/or problem-solving, and simply setting aside a specific time to think about what is on your mind. When you are feeling especially anxious, try the [5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique](#).

5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 Grounding Technique

If you are experiencing panic or anxiety, you most likely consumed by a future worry. This simple technique helps anchor you back into the present moment so you can concentrate.

	5	Name 5 things you can see around you now
	4	Name 4 things you can feel on your body now
	3	Name 3 things you can hear right now
	2	Name 2 things you can smell right now
	1	Name 1 thing you taste now