

Brain Fog in Post COVID-19 Recovery

Post-COVID-19

Interdisciplinary Clinical Care Network

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► During their COVID recovery, many patients say they feel like they have “brain fog”. This is a term that people use to describe problems they have with their usual cognition or thinking such as difficulty concentrating, remembering things, thinking quickly, planning, and problem-solving. Some people describe this as being unable to focus or to feel sharp in their thinking.



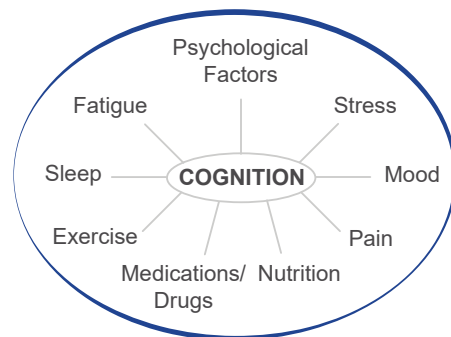
These symptoms can be worse or last longer if you also have other challenges such as sleep problems, pain, or mental health issues. Brain fog often becomes worse with fatigue, meaning the more tired you are, the more you may feel like you have difficulty thinking.

Many things affect cognition. By managing them, cognition generally improves. Since many of these factors are connected, a positive change in one area can have an effect in other areas, resulting in an even bigger change in cognition.

Ways to help

Here are some ways to manage cognitive changes following your COVID illness:

1. Use energy conservation or pacing strategies to pace yourself through your day and week to save mental energy. See handout “[Pacing for Fatigue](#)” for more information.
2. Take frequent breaks, working for shorter periods of time.



3. Avoid drugs and alcohol.
4. Find healthy ways to manage or cope with stress.
5. Pay attention to your mood and sleep.
6. Get regular, safe amounts of physical activity that don't worsen your symptoms.
You may need to start with gentle things, like deep breathing or stretching.
7. Remind yourself it is normal to have cognitive slips sometimes.

Specific strategies

Here are some more detailed tips for dealing with cognitive difficulties:

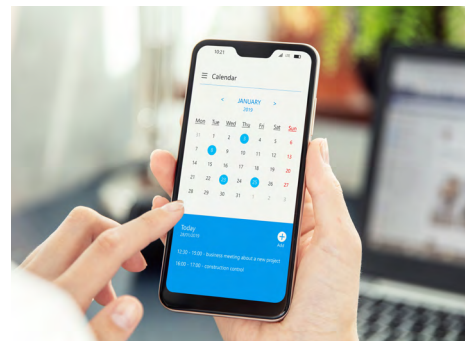
Tasks

- Break up difficult tasks into smaller steps and focus on one step at a time. It may help to write down all the steps and cross them off as you go.
- Set targets or goals that are realistic and achievable. Starting small can make the goal more realistic, and then you can build up over time.
- Choose a time when you are most alert to take on challenging mental tasks.
- Plan ahead and keep yourself in a regular routine.



Memory

- Use a calendar or day planner to keep track of appointments.
- Set reminders on your phone, and use an alarm if that will help.
- Write things down or use your phone to help you remember. Use notes, a voice recorder, or use your phone's camera to capture visual information you need to remember (eg. parking stall #).
- Keep your items, especially important things like your wallet and keys, in the same place.
- If you can't remember a word, try describing the word, saying something similar, thinking of the opposite word, or using gestures to help you remember.



Environment

- Keep your living space tidy. This helps limit the distractions around you.
- Reduce/eliminate other distractions when you are trying to concentrate (eg. turn off the radio, go to a quiet corner, clean and organize your workspace, use soft lighting or try ear plugs or noise cancelling headphones).



Asking for help is important but can be difficult. Let your loved ones and others around you know what you are experiencing and your symptoms. Without knowing what you need or what you are going through, it can be difficult to provide support.

Talk to your doctor or other health professional if your cognitive function is not improving. They can discuss ways to help you or make a referral to other supports if needed.



Remember that practicing energy conservation strategies and staying within your “energy envelope” is an effective way of managing brain fog.

For more information on how to support your understanding and management of symptoms as you recover from COVID-19, please visit www.phsa.ca/health-info/post-covid-19-care-recovery



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