

Chemo Brain

Is there a natural alternative to treat it?

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Chemo brain is a debilitating condition that occurs in 25-80% of patients who have cancer or received chemotherapy. Symptoms include poor memory, inability to concentrate or perform multiple tasks and they can persist for 10 years after the diagnosis of cancer. Chemo brain is an actual syndrome that can be detected by neuropsychological testing, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and positron emission tomography (PET scans).

The cause of chemo brain is inflammatory cytokines (IC's). IC's are the substances normally secreted by the immune system to help fight infections. When IC's are chronically elevated, they lead to chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, and dementia. Modern medicine to date has no standard therapies for chemo brain but one should attack the root cause; inflammation.

The anti-inflammatory diet is the most important change a cancer patient can make to combat fatigue and chemo brain. The basic diet includes a variety of fresh unprocessed foods, and lots of fruits and vegetables grains and nuts. Carbohydrate sources should be from whole grains (not wheat), beans, and squashes and sweet potatoes. Fats, approximately 600 calories a day, should include twice as much mono-unsaturated oils (olive oil) as poly-unsaturated or saturated fats. Lighter oils such as canola, high-oleic sunflower or safflower oils are alternatives, but avoid corn oil,

cottonseed oil, mixed vegetable oils and regular sunflower/safflower oils. Good protein sources include fish, non-fat dairy products, or vegetable protein.

Try to eat 40 grams of fiber a day, especially through consumption of fruit, berries, beans and whole grains. Eat a large variety of fresh fruits and vegetables of all colors. The more colors the better. Drink 6-8 glasses of water daily. Anti-oxidant rich tea is preferable to coffee.

Helpful dietary supplements include ginkgo biloba and fish oil. Ginkgo has been used for thousands of years. Its anti-inflammatory effects have made it useful in treating dementia and vascular diseases. Fish oil, a source of anti-inflammatory omega-3 fatty acids, is useful in treating a variety of inflammatory conditions.

Chemo brain is a chronic condition found in patients who have cancer which is likely caused by chronic inflammation. Modern medicine, while offering no treatment for chemo brain, overlooks the simple, natural methods of combating inflammation; an anti-inflammatory diet and supplements such as fish oil capsules and Ginkgo Biloba. These are the keys to combating chemo brain and fatigue.

Dr. Avery is owner of Citrine Sun LLC, a company dedicated to providing information and supplements to help cancer patients and survivors through their cancer journey. Learn more at www.citrinesun.com or email: AskDrAvery@citrinesun.com, or phone 314-609-7137.