

Brain Fog

Brain fog is a debilitating symptom of complex chronic disease and is part of the diagnostic criteria for ME/CFS and FM. Brain fog can be described as the experience of mental fatigue that impacts a person's daily function. More specifically patients report many deficits in cognitive activity inclusive of difficulties with memory, attention, information processing, word retrieval, foggy thinking, and feeling confused and disoriented.

What factors impact your brain fog?

Managing brain fog can be frustrating, confusing and emotionally exhausting. It can be helpful to start with exploring what factors impact and trigger your brain fog. Many patients find it helpful to track their symptoms and activity to find out what factors increase, and what factors reduce symptoms. Here are some areas to consider:

- **Pain:** Pain can have a big impact on your cognitive function. Finding tools to manage pain can reduce brain fog. Talk to your Doctor about pain management options and review the pain management resources.
- **Energy:** Staying within your energy envelope can reduce fatigue and crashing. It can also have a positive impact on brain fog. Review the energy management section.
- **Sleep:** When your sleep is not restorative, it might be worth investigating any sleep difficulties, as well as sleep apnea and other combinations of disordered sleep. See the sleep resources.
- **Stress:** Stressful stimuli (physical, mental, emotional, financial, environmental, etc.) can contribute to living outside your energy envelope and increase brain fog. Understanding what type of stress increases your brain fog can be beneficial.
- **Medications:** Some medications (for pain, sleep or other symptoms) can be found to increase brain fog. Talk to your Doctor about your medications and whether timing can reduce your brain fog symptoms.
- **Nutrition:** Thiamin, folic acid and vitamin B12 are linked with improving cognitive function. Talk to a registered dietitian about what dietary balance might be helpful. HealthLinkBC (811) to speak to a Dietitian. See the nutrition resources.

Strategies to help you manage cognitive energy

We can often underestimate the impact of cognitive activity on our energy reserves / energy envelope. Below you will find some ideas on how to manage your cognitive energy.

- **Energy Management:** Recognize your energy limits, specifically considering cognitive energy, and apply pacing principles to manage the energy you have. Review pacing and energy management.
- **Take brain breaks:** Build frequent rest breaks into your day, before, during and after activity. Explore what types of activity you find calms your mind and gives your brain a break. For example: mindfulness, breathing, meditation, stretching, laying down.
- **Memory:** Using memory aids, such as notebooks, calendars and smart phones to track information can reduce energy used to retain information. Use verbal cues to remember that you have completed a task.

- Attention: Avoid multitasking. Break tasks up into small pieces. Limit sensory overload: explore if you are more sensitive to particular stimuli like light, sound, visual, smell and try strategies to reduce overload. For example: noise cancelling headphones.
- Organization: Build systems that work around your home to eliminate ongoing problem solving and decision making to save cognitive energy. For example: have a system for sorting mail/paperwork/paying bills; keep your keys, wallet, and phone in the same place.
- Patience / Self-compassion: Brain fog causes frustration, which takes more energy. By practicing self compassion you may avoid using your cognitive energy on frustrations.
- Humour: Using humour can help relieve stress, which is known to increase brain fog. Finding humour in challenging moments can reduce tension and alleviate the build up of frustrations.

Other resources:

<https://batemanhornecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/filebase/education/2018-BHC-CME-PP-Cognitive-Impairment-Lecture-uploaded-12.29.20.pdf>