

Brain Fog and Traumatic Brain Injury

What is Brain Fog?

- A **group of symptoms** affecting thinking and mental energy
- Enjoyable activities can become exhausting
- Brain fog can look different for everyone

Common symptoms of brain fog:

- Trouble thinking clearly
- Mental fatigue or feeling exhausted after simple tasks
- Memory problems
- Forgetting things easily
- Slow processing
- Difficulty focusing
- Trouble concentrating
- Losing words
- Sensory overload

Some people:

- Lose track of conversations.
- Forget appointments.
- Become overwhelmed in noisy environments.
- Notice slower thinking speed
- Have difficulty organizing tasks
- Need more recovery time after mental activity

Brain fog may get worse because of:

- Poor sleep
- Pain
- Stress
- Overstimulation
- Anxiety or depression
- Medication side effects
- Pushing too hard without enough rest.

Symptoms of the “Invisible Challenge”

- Invisible symptoms are still real.
- You may hear people say “you look fine”
- Someone may look physically fine while struggling internally

This can lead to:

- Frustration
- Shame/Guilt
- Self-doubt
- Feeling misunderstood.

Signs of Cognitive fatigue:

- Headaches
- Irritability
- Confusion
- Shutdown
- Emotional overload

You might hit a point where:

- Concentration drops
- Emotions become harder to regulate
- The brain simply needs rest.

THIS IS NOT LAZINESS, IT'S NEUROLOGICAL FATIGUE

Coping Strategies for cognitive fatigue:

- Do one thing at a time
- Writing things down
- Use reminders and calendars
- Reduce distractions
- Pace yourself; it doesn't all need to be done today
- Take breaks BEFORE exhaustion happens
- Stick to routines

Tips to remember:

- Using tools is not cheating; It's adapting
- Athletes use equipment
- People with vision problems use glasses
- Brain supports are no different
- Brain fog is not a character flaw; it is a neurological symptom.
- Recovery is rarely a straight line. Good days and difficult days can exist in the same week

When Brain Fog feels frustrating, try reminding yourself:

- My symptoms are real.
- Needing rest is okay.
- Supports and reminders are tools, not weaknesses.
- Recovery is not linear.
- Small progress still counts.

Ask yourself:

- What is my brain needing right now?
- What can I simplify?
- What support would help today?

External memory supports:

- phone reminders
- calendars
- notebooks
- sticky notes
- routines

Communication tools

Use phrases like:

- “I need a minute to process.”
- “Can you repeat that more slowly?”
- “I’m having a foggy moment.”

Asking yourself the right questions:

- Instead of asking “what’s wrong with me?”, ask yourself “**what is my brain needing right now?**”
- Instead of saying “I should be able to do this”, ask yourself, “**what support would make this easier?**”

Measuring Success:

- People measure success in a variety of ways.
- People with brain injury often measure success by how much they can do. What if we shift our thinking to:
 - Measuring success by how well we care for ourselves while doing it?

Other Factors That Can Increase Brain Fog:

Brain fog may worsen because of:

- Symptoms of cancer or cancer treatment (“chemo brain”)
 - affects confidence
 - people may think you are not paying attention
 - you may be embarrassed to ask someone to repeat information
 - “Chemo brain isn't just forgetting where you put your keys. It's feeling like your mind doesn't work the way it used to, at a time when you need it most.”
- Symptoms of menopause and hormonal changes (estrogen levels drop)
 - Walking into a room and forgetting why you went there
 - Losing track of conversations or meetings
 - Struggling to remember names or common words
 - Finding it harder to multitask
 - Feeling mentally slower or less sharp than before
 - Having difficulty concentrating on work or reading
 - "Menopausal brain fog isn't losing your intelligence; it's feeling like your mental clarity has been temporarily turned down."
- stress and anxiety
- poor sleep/hot flashes
- chronic pain
- fatigue
- medication side effects

These experiences are real and common.

Multiple health conditions can affect thinking and mental energy at the same time.