



Hey Sis!
REVIVING THE SPIRIT OF
WOMANHOOD

EMPOWERED MINDS:

Conquering Chemo Brain and Embracing Life Beyond Cancer

Brought to you by My Sister's Keeper Cleveland (MySKCle), where we support, uplift, and empower women on their cancer journey.





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Welcome to My Sister's Keeper



At My Sister's Keeper- Cleveland (MySKCle), we understand the many challenges faced by women undergoing cancer treatment and beyond. From the physical toll of treatment to the mental strain that comes with cognitive changes, especially as they relate to chemo brain and menopause, we are here to walk with you every step of the way. This booklet is designed to help you understand the cognitive effects that can come with cancer treatment, how menopause plays a role, and ways to reclaim and protect your cognitive health.

What Is Chemo Brain?

As many of our sisters can attest, cancer treatments can leave a lasting impact beyond the body. Chemo brain is a term used to describe cognitive difficulties that many women experience during and after cancer treatment. It's not just a short-term effect—these challenges can linger for years. You might notice:

- Difficulty concentrating or paying attention
- Problems with memory—forgetting names, dates, or even everyday words
- Slower thinking or feeling mentally foggy
- Struggling to find the right words in conversation

For some women, these issues can feel subtle but constant. For others, they might feel like a more significant barrier in everyday life. These cognitive effects can be frustrating, but with the right tools and support, we can work through them together.



"She stood in the storm, and when the wind did not blow her way, she adjusted her sails."

— Elizabeth Edwards



Why Does Chemo Brain Happen?

Chemotherapy, radiation, and hormone treatments for cancer can affect the brain. These treatments cross into the central nervous system and may damage the healthy brain cells responsible for memory, focus, and multitasking. The result? A mental fog that doesn't clear up right away.

But it's more than just the treatments themselves. The stress of diagnosis, the emotional toll of managing life while healing, and the changes that come with menopause can all add layers to this cognitive strain.

Menopause and Cancer Treatment

For some women undergoing cancer treatment, pushing the body into menopause is a necessary part of the overall cancer care plan. This is particularly true for women with hormone-sensitive cancers like breast cancer or ovarian cancer.

Why Some Cancer Treatments Intentionally Induce Menopause

Certain types of cancer—especially those that are fueled by hormones such as estrogen and progesterone—are treated by reducing or eliminating the body's natural hormone production. Treatments aimed at reducing estrogen can stop or slow the growth of hormone-positive tumors. For women of reproductive age, this often involves pushing the body into menopause through various medical interventions.

Here are some treatments that aim to induce menopause as part of cancer care:

- **Hormone Therapy (Endocrine Therapy):** Drugs like tamoxifen, aromatase inhibitors, and GnRH agonists (like leuprolide) work by blocking the production or use of estrogen, essentially mimicking the effects of menopause. The goal is to stop estrogen from feeding cancer cells.
- **Oophorectomy:** In some cases, doctors may recommend removing the ovaries (surgically induced menopause) to eliminate the body's main source of estrogen.
- **Chemotherapy:** Certain chemotherapy drugs can cause the ovaries to stop functioning, leading to either temporary or permanent menopause, depending on the woman's age and the specific drugs used.



“The human spirit is stronger than anything that can happen to it.”

— C.C. Scott

Studies Show

Hormone deprivation therapy is a common approach in treating hormone-receptor-positive cancers, particularly breast cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, about 70% of breast cancers are hormone receptor-positive, meaning they grow in response to estrogen or progesterone. The goal of therapies like aromatase inhibitors or GnRH agonists is to lower estrogen levels in postmenopausal women or induce a menopausal state in premenopausal women, effectively "starving" the cancer of the hormones it needs to grow. While this treatment approach is life-saving, it can also induce symptoms of early menopause, including cognitive changes, mood swings, and increased risk of osteoporosis .

American Cancer Society. (n.d.). Hormone therapy for breast cancer. Retrieved from <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/breast-cancer/treatment/hormone-therapy.html>

Menopause and Cognitive Changes

Many women face cognitive challenges when they enter menopause, and for cancer survivors, menopause can come earlier or more abruptly due to treatment. Menopause causes hormonal shifts—particularly the drop in estrogen—which directly affects brain function. Estrogen plays a vital role in protecting the brain, helping with memory, mood regulation, and focus.

For women who enter early menopause due to cancer treatments like chemotherapy or hormone therapy, the sudden changes can bring more intense cognitive issues, compounded by chemo brain. This combination can feel overwhelming, but remember, you are not alone in this journey.

Symptoms of Cognitive Changes Post-Treatment and in Menopause

Many women in our My Sister's Keeper family have reported:

- Memory lapses and forgetfulness, sometimes even forgetting where they left their keys or missing appointments.
- Trouble focusing, especially when there are distractions or multiple things happening at once.
- Feeling overwhelmed by tasks that were once simple.
- Difficulty following conversations or feeling "foggy."

These are real and valid experiences. Your body and mind have been through tremendous change, but with awareness and the right steps, you can take back control of your mental clarity.

“**You may have to fight a battle more than once to win it.**”

— Margaret Thatcher





Strategies to Manage Chemo Brain and Cognitive Health

At My Sister's Keeper, we believe in holistic care—caring for your mind, body, and spirit as you journey through survivorship. Here are some strategies to help manage chemo brain and cognitive changes:

1. Exercise Your Brain

Your brain is like a muscle—it needs regular activity to stay strong.

- Mental exercises like puzzles, crosswords, or memory games can help sharpen your mind.
- Apps like Lumosity or BrainHQ offer tailored brain training exercises that can help improve focus, memory, and problem-solving.

2. Stay Physically Active

Exercise is not just for your body—it benefits your brain too!

- Aerobic exercises like walking, swimming, or light jogging improve blood flow to the brain, promoting mental clarity and reducing mental fatigue.
- Strength training can help improve coordination and cognitive function.

3. Mindfulness and Meditation

Sometimes, you need to quiet the mind to heal it.

- Mindfulness meditation can help reduce stress, improve focus, and increase emotional regulation. Even just a few minutes a day of deep breathing or meditation can have a profound effect.
- Yoga combines physical movement with mindfulness and has been shown to help manage both cognitive and emotional symptoms of menopause and chemo brain.

4. Create Routine and Use Tools to Stay Organized

When cognitive fog hits, it helps to rely on systems that take the burden off your memory.

- Keep a planner or use your phone's calendar to track important dates, appointments, and tasks. Set reminders!
- Use sticky notes for reminders in visible places or apps that help you organize your day.
- Break larger tasks into smaller steps to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

5. Eat Brain-Boosting Foods

Fuel your mind with the right nutrients:

- Foods rich in Omega-3s, like salmon, flaxseeds, and walnuts, help reduce inflammation and improve brain health.
- Berries and leafy greens are rich in antioxidants, which protect brain cells from damage.
- Turmeric contains curcumin, a powerful anti-inflammatory that supports cognitive health.
- Stay hydrated—even mild dehydration can affect your cognitive performance!

Strategies to Manage Chemo Brain and Cognitive Health, cont'd.

6. Sleep, Rest, and Recover

Sleep is vital for cognitive health. Your brain needs time to rest and repair.

- Prioritize getting 7-9 hours of sleep each night.
- Create a calming bedtime routine: avoid screens before bed, and unwind with soft music or reading.
- Address night sweats or hot flashes by sleeping in a cool room with light, breathable bedding.

Long-Term Cognitive Support in Menopause and Beyond

Your journey doesn't end with treatment. Cognitive changes may last for years after chemotherapy, but they don't have to define you. By staying proactive and making small adjustments, you can take control of your mental well-being.

1. Hormonal Support (with Your Doctor's Guidance)

For some women, hormone replacement therapy (HRT) can relieve menopausal symptoms, including cognitive challenges. However, if you've had hormone-sensitive cancer (like breast cancer), HRT might not be recommended. Always talk to your healthcare team about your options.

2. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

If chemo brain is affecting your quality of life, cognitive behavioral therapy can provide strategies to help manage cognitive issues. This form of therapy helps change negative thought patterns and develop coping skills to work through memory or focus difficulties.

3. Find Your Tribe

Remember, My Sister's Keeper is your support network. Whether you join a support group or attend one of our Sisters' Soirees, staying connected to a community of women who understand what you're going through can make all the difference. Sometimes, simply sharing your experiences can relieve the emotional burden.

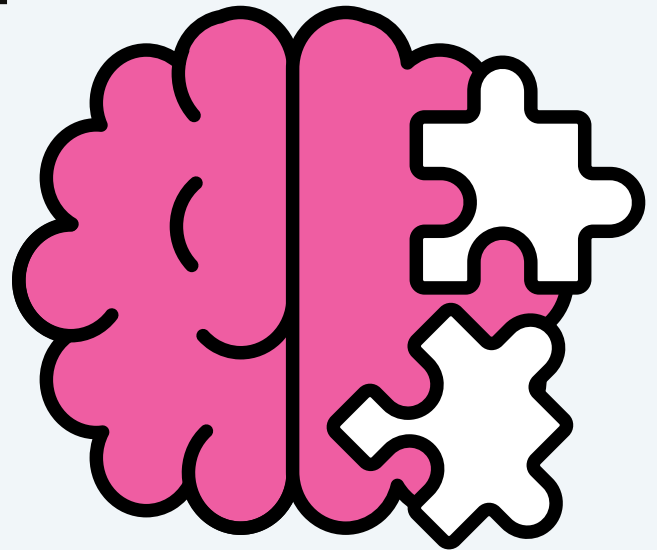


You Are More Than Your Symptoms

At My Sister's Keeper, we celebrate the warrior spirit in every woman. While chemo brain and cognitive changes can feel like an uphill battle, know that you have the strength, resilience, and support to reclaim your mental clarity and live with confidence.

If you ever feel overwhelmed, remember: you are not alone. We are here for you. Together, we will rise, and together we will thrive.

For more resources, visit myskcle.org or call us at (216) 333-1819.



Word Puzzles and Games

- **Crossword Puzzles:** Crosswords are great for improving language skills, word recall, and critical thinking. They engage different parts of the brain and are perfect for those who love words.
- **Word Search Puzzles:** Word searches are useful for practicing focus, pattern recognition, and attention to detail. It's a great, less complex alternative to crosswords.
- **Scrabble or Boggle:** These games can be played solo or with friends, and they help enhance vocabulary and cognitive processing speed.

Memory Games

- **Matching Games:** These classic memory card games involve flipping over cards to find matching pairs. They improve short-term memory, attention, and concentration.
- **Simon:** The Simon game (or digital versions of it) requires you to repeat increasingly complex patterns of colors or sounds, which is great for improving memory and cognitive flexibility.
- **Digital Memory Apps:** Apps like Peak and Elevate offer memory-specific exercises that track progress over time, helping to build both short- and long-term memory.

Logic Puzzles

- **Sudoku:** Sudoku puzzles are fantastic for working on problem-solving and logic. This numbers-based game challenges cognitive reasoning and critical thinking skills.
- **Kakuro:** Similar to Sudoku but with an added math component, Kakuro puzzles combine math and logic, engaging both sides of the brain.
- **Nonograms:** Also known as picture logic puzzles, these involve filling in grids according to numerical clues, improving logical deduction and spatial awareness.

Jigsaw Puzzles

- **Traditional Jigsaw Puzzles:** Putting together a jigsaw puzzle stimulates both sides of the brain. The logical left brain is engaged by fitting the pieces together, while the creative right brain helps in recognizing patterns and colors.
- **Online Jigsaw Puzzles:** If physical puzzles are too bulky or difficult to manage, there are plenty of digital jigsaw puzzles that can be done on a tablet or computer, providing the same cognitive benefits in a more flexible format.

Number Games

- **Math Puzzles:** Games like KenKen and MathDoku involve simple arithmetic and logic to solve puzzles. These games improve problem-solving abilities and keep mental math sharp.
- **Count Backward by Sevens:** A simple exercise for practicing working memory and cognitive processing, try counting backward from 100 by sevens.

Brain Training Apps

- **Lumosity:** Lumosity is a well-known brain-training app that offers a variety of games targeting different cognitive skills, such as attention, memory, problem-solving, and flexibility. It adjusts to your progress and challenges you as you improve.
- **BrainHQ:** BrainHQ focuses on improving memory, speed, and attention with scientifically-backed exercises designed for mental fitness.
- **Elevate:** This app focuses on improving skills related to reading, writing, speaking, math, and memory. It's customizable based on the user's goals and tracks progress over time.

Creative Activities

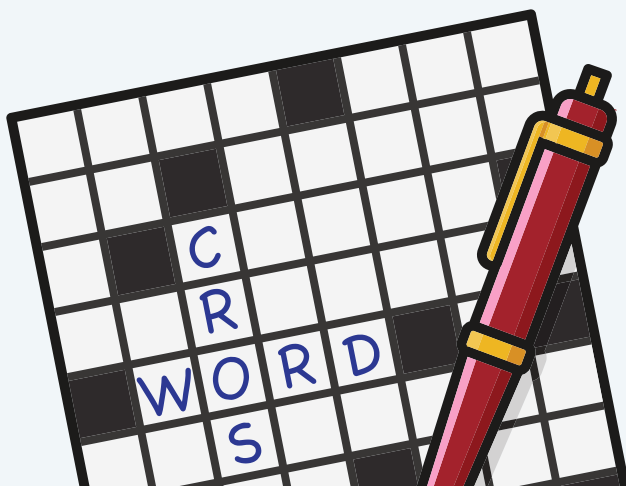
- **Drawing or Coloring:** Activities like drawing, painting, or coloring mandalas can reduce stress and boost cognitive function by engaging the brain's creative centers. These exercises encourage mindfulness and help improve focus and relaxation.
- **Craft Projects:** Engaging in hands-on projects like knitting, crocheting, or beading helps stimulate both cognitive and motor skills. These activities require attention to detail, following patterns, and problem-solving.

Board Games

- **Chess:** Chess is a fantastic game for improving strategic thinking and cognitive flexibility. It strengthens memory and helps in planning and thinking ahead.
- **Checkers:** For a simpler option, checkers can help improve concentration and quick decision-making.
- **Rummikub:** This tile-based game enhances memory and strategic thinking, similar to Scrabble but with numbers instead of words.

Language Learning

- **Language Learning Apps:** Apps like Duolingo or Babbel offer fun, bite-sized language lessons that engage the brain and help with memory retention. Learning a new language is one of the best ways to keep the brain sharp and improve cognitive flexibility.



Sample Cognitive Exercise Routine

For women dealing with cognitive changes due to chemo brain or menopause, here's an example of how to incorporate these activities into a daily routine:

- Morning: Start with a 15-minute brain warm-up, like a quick crossword puzzle or Sudoku.
- Afternoon: Spend 20 minutes on a creative activity, like coloring or working on a jigsaw puzzle. If you're short on time, do a few rounds of a brain-training app.
- Evening: End the day with a fun family or solo game like Scrabble, chess, or a memory matching game. You can also use a memory app before bed.

These activities offer both mental stimulation and enjoyment, helping women manage cognitive difficulties in a way that is not only effective but also engaging.

Adding these activities to your daily routine can be a fun, empowering way to maintain cognitive health. They can be done solo or with others and are flexible enough to fit into any schedule. Remember, at My Sister's Keeper, we are here to support you every step of the way as you find ways to thrive mentally, physically, and emotionally. Together, we can sharpen our minds and embrace each day with clarity and strength!





Your journey is one of courage, strength, and sisterhood.

At My Sister's Keeper, we believe in empowering you to embrace every chapter—through challenges, change, and growth. Together, we rise.

Join the My Sister's Keeper community.

Share your story, find support, and uplift others as we walk this journey together.

Connect with us today:

- Website: www.myskcle.org
- Phone: (216) 333-1819
- Email: info@myskcle.org
- Social Media:
 - Instagram: @MySKCle
 - Facebook: MySKCle

Visit us online to:

- Explore resources and educational tools
- Find upcoming events and workshops
- Connect with a Sister who understands
- Get involved in empowering others

Whether you're seeking support or ready to give it, My Sister's Keeper is here for you.

WARRIOR
