

Brain Fog

The Foundation thanks Elaine Alexander, MD, PhD, clinician and researcher in Sjögren's syndrome, biomedical consultant and Chair-Elect of the Sjögren's Foundation Medical and Scientific Advisory Board, San Diego, California, for authoring this Patient Education Sheet.

What is Brain Fog? Brain Fog is a lay term to describe fluctuating mild memory loss that is inappropriate for a person's age. It may include forgetfulness, spaciness, confusion, decreased ability to pay attention, an inability to focus, and difficulty in processing information. Remember that gradual cognitive decline from early adulthood is a fact of life. Brain Fog can occur in Sjögren's, but other factors might cause these symptoms and should be considered by you and your doctor.

What YOU can do about Brain Fog:

- ▶ Manage your lifestyle to optimize your health and sense of well-being.
- ▶ Develop a close working relationship with your doctor(s):
 - Always report changes in cognition/memory and mood (depression, anxiety).
 - Make sure your physician knows about all the prescription and OTC medications you are taking. Especially in patients over 65-70 years of age, a major cause of cognitive dysfunction can be side effects of drugs and drug interactions.
 - Inquire about your hormonal status, thyroid function, and blood pressure.
- ▶ Additional actions:
 - Rejuvenate with sufficient sleep. If after 8-9 hours of sleep you are still tired, tell your doctor.
 - Minimize stress and anxiety:
 - Set realistic expectations
 - Plan ahead
 - Take breaks throughout the day
 - Learn relaxation exercises and practice them at regular intervals
 - Balance work and leisure
 - Let yourself laugh
 - Talk about feelings
 - Limit multi-tasking and focus on one task at a time
 - Reduce caffeine and alcohol.
 - Manage musculoskeletal and joint pain effectively.
 - Exercise regularly. Adequate physical exercise enhances cognition/memory.
 - **Train the Brain!** "If you don't use it, you will lose it."
 - Boost your brain power: Continue to work into retirement (part time), learn new skills, volunteer, engage in social and mentally stimulating activities, and establish new friendships and relationships.
 - Take your body to the gym and don't forget to visit the "BRAIN SPA" – both will improve brain function.
 - **Recent scientific data show that longevity is associated with the successful management of chronic diseases, such as Sjögren's, not the absence of any disease!**
- ▶ Suggested reading: *The Memory Bible*, by Gary Small, MD, Director of the UCLA Center on Aging, available from the Sjögren's Foundation.