

BRAIN FOG

This factsheet aims to explain and answer some commonly-asked questions about **brain fog**.

It explains what brain fog is, what causes brain fog, and some techniques you can use to manage brain fog.



What is brain fog?

“Brain fog” is not a medical term. It is a term used by people who experience it, across a range of conditions, to describe a set of symptoms that tend to go together.

Brain fog is a **loss of mental and cognitive function** which people often get when they are fatigued or struggling with other symptoms. It is usually something that comes and goes.

What does brain fog do?

Brain fog does not have a strict set of symptoms, but can include:

- Memory difficulties
- Trouble with concentration or focus
- Trouble processing information, e.g. understanding what someone says to you
- Difficulty organising yourself and managing your time
- Dizziness, unsteadiness, or loss of co-ordination
- Extreme tiredness or fatigue
- Blurred or disrupted vision
- Poor judgement or planning

People with dyslexia sometimes find that brain fog makes their dyslexia worse. This is down to the impact of a condition on the language centre in the brain

These symptoms can last for any length of time, but usually pass within a few days.

What causes brain fog?

Brain fog can be caused by a lot of conditions. Some of the most common are:

- Long Covid
- Fibromyalgia or ME/CFS
- Multiple sclerosis
- Depression
- Stroke
- Migraine
- Menopause or hormone changes

Stress, fatigue, and inflammation can all contribute to brain fog. The exact causes of brain fog are not fully understood. However, it most often occurs when other symptoms are worse than usual.

Brain fog is most often the result of some kind of medical fatigue. For many people with chronic fatigue conditions, brain fog is the most noticeable and disruptive symptom.

For more information on fatigue, check out the CHSS booklet on **Tiredness and Fatigue**

How do I manage my brain fog?

There are several approaches you can take if you have brain fog, to make things easier for yourself. For example:

- Write down key information or tasks, so that you find it easier to remember.
- Try to find a place with minimal distractions and background noise, so you have fewer distractions to deal with.
- Let the people around you know that you are struggling. Show them this factsheet or the wallet cards produced by Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland to help explain, if necessary.
- Try to rest and relax. If you can't rest entirely, try to find easy and simple tasks to do. Avoid stressful and difficult work where possible.
- Have healthy snacks readily available for days when you may struggle to focus on cooking
- Rest whenever possible when your brain fog is bad.
- Keep a list of work tasks you can do which you find easiest when you have brain fog - for example, simple admin tasks, tidying your desk, or organising your emails.
- Avoid tasks that need a lot of concentration or emotional energy.
- Consider meditation or mindfulness exercises to help reduce stress.
- Try to avoid sugar and caffeine, which can make fatigue and brain fog worse.
- Take regular breaks, at least once an hour, and try to change what task you are doing as often as possible.

How do I help someone else with brain fog?

If someone around you has brain fog, you can make life easier for them in many ways:

- Speak slowly and clearly, and use short and simple sentences where possible.
- Instead of asking open questions, you can make it easier for the person to answer by giving them options to choose from.
- Be patient and be prepared to repeat key information if necessary.
- Give them space. This can mean giving them time to answer, or making sure they physically have space around them.
- Turn off background noises like radios or TVs, and try to minimise distractions.
- You may have to tell the person something they already know. Remember that they aren't being difficult on purpose, and be patient.
- It may be helpful to write things down, especially if you are asking the person to do something or to remember something later.

The most important thing you can do for someone with brain fog is to **be understanding**.

Brain fog is often very frustrating for the person dealing with it. Being patient, reassuring, and understanding when they are struggling with a task or conversation can make all the difference.

If you are responsible for the workload of someone with brain fog - for example, if you are their manager at work - consider whether there are tasks you can give them which are less demanding, or, ideally, whether you can give them some time off or breaks to rest.