THINKING PROBLEMS

What Causes Thinking Problems for patients with cancer?
Cognitive dysfunction is the inability to think clearly, due to memory loss, distractibility, performing multiple tasks and trouble with arithmetic and language skills. When people with cancer experience cognitive dysfunction it is generally fairly mild and tends to respond well to focused rehabilitation efforts.

What causes thinking problems or cognitive dysfunction?
There are many causes of cognitive dysfunction for people with cancer. They may include the direct effects of cancer within the central nervous system, indirect effects of certain cancers or effects of cancer treatments on the brain. The range may be from subtle and unnoticed to a devastating collection of symptoms. In the advanced stages, it has up to a 85% prevalence.

Are there any Risk Factors?
You may be at higher risk for cognitive difficulties if you have the following:
- Anemia, Hypoxia (deficiency of oxygen)
- Infection
- Chemotherapy
- Radiation Therapy
- Hormone Therapy
- Biologics
- Emotional Disturbance
- Central Nervous System Cancers
- Fatigue
- Kidney failure
- Liver Failure
- Fluid & Electrolyte Imbalance
- Certain Medications
- Nutritional deficiency
What to Do?
• Try to decrease workload
• Avoid multiple tasks
• Make to help remember what needs to be done
• Get more sleep
• Avoid emergency situations where quick thinking might be required
• Remember that most people recover fully from the effects of chemotherapy

Additional Information:
Web sites:
www.managingmanagedcare.com/controversies/chemobr.doc

www.cancer.gov.cancertopics/factsheet/support/support-groups
www.nci.nih.gov/cancerinfo/pdq/supportivecare/delirium/patient
www.3.mdanderson.org/oncolog/cognitivenovdec01.html
www.plwe.org/cognitiveproblems