

Contents

Key points	1
What is brain fog?	2
What does brain fog do?	2
What causes brain fog?	2
How do I manage my brain fog?	3
Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland resources	3
How do I support someone else with brain fog?	4

KEY POINTS

- “Brain fog” is an informal term for a range of temporary changes to thinking, memory, and cognitive function.
- Brain fog can include memory loss, difficulty with planning or organisation, difficulty processing or retaining information, and difficulty focusing. It may also be accompanied by physical symptoms like dizziness or blurred vision.
- Brain fog is a symptom of many different conditions, including Long Covid and stroke.
- Brain fog is usually worst when you are tired or stressed.
- You can manage brain fog by planning and preparing for periods of low function. Avoid stress and strain where possible, and be honest with the people around you if you are struggling.
- You can support people with brain fog by being patient and understanding, giving them space, and slowing down conversations or taking notes they can refer back to later.

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 strictly-defined 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 on the language centre in the brain

How severe these symptoms are will vary with time. All of the symptoms are worse when you are tired or under stress, and reduce significantly when you feel better.

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.

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 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 affecting you significantly.
- 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.

If you have chronic fatigue, you can manage your brain fog by managing your energy levels. For more information on doing this, see the Chest Heart and Stroke Booklet on **Tiredness and Fatigue**.

All of Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland's booklets and factsheets can be found online or ordered in print at www.chss.org.uk/resources-hub

This includes the following relevant documents:

Tiredness and Fatigue Essential Guide

Life with Long Covid Essential Guide

Energy Mapping worksheet

Battery Tracker worksheet

Educational Support factsheet

Employment Rights factsheet

You can also get personal support, information, and advice by calling our Advice Line on **0808 801 0899** or texting **NURSE** to **66777**.

How do I help someone 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.



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