

Review finds some evidence for 'chemo brain' in breast cancer survivors

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(Medical Xpress)—A large meta-analysis conducted by researchers at Moffitt Cancer Center has concluded that breast cancer patients treated with chemotherapy are at risk for mild cognitive deficits after treatment. The meta-analysis, or analytic review of previously published studies, found that study participants on average had mild impairments in verbal abilities (such as difficulty choosing words) and visuospatial abilities (such as getting lost more easily). The study noted that cognitive functioning varies across survivors, with some reporting no impairments and others reporting more severe or pervasive deficits.

The study was published in a recent issue of the [Journal of Clinical Oncology](#). The research was supported in part by the [National Cancer Institute](#), part of the National Institutes of Health, through grant number K07 CA138499.

"The objective of our analysis was to clarify existing research on cognitive functioning in patients who had received standard dose chemotherapy for [breast cancer](#) at least six months previously," said study lead author Heather S.L. Jim, Ph.D., an assistant member at Moffitt whose research focuses on the psychosocial and behavioral aspects of cancer survivorship. "Earlier studies had reported conflicting evidence on the severity of cognitive deficits, especially over the long term."

Although this is an active area of research, an overall analysis of the studies had not been performed since 2006, explained the researchers.

"Our analysis indicated that patients previously treated with chemotherapy performed significantly worse on tests of verbal ability than individuals without cancer," noted co-author Paul B. Jacobsen, Moffitt senior member and associate center director of Population Sciences. "In addition, patients treated with chemotherapy performed significantly worse on tests of visuospatial ability than patients who had not had chemotherapy."

"[Breast cancer patients](#) treated with chemotherapy who have subsequent cognitive deficits should be referred to a neuropsychologist for evaluation and management of the deficits," Jim said. "Management usually involves developing an awareness of the situations in which their cognitive difficulties are likely to arise so that they can come up with strategies to compensate. Research shows that such strategies can make a big difference in daily life when cognitive difficulties do arise."

More information: [jco.ascopubs.org/content/early ...
011.39.5640.full.pdf](http://jco.ascopubs.org/content/early/2012/09/04/011.39.5640.full.pdf)

Provided by H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute

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