

# Memory and thought-process training show promise in managing breast cancer symptoms

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A new Indiana University study is the first of its kind to show it may be possible to improve memory and thought process speed among breast cancer survivors.

Diane M. Von Ah, Ph.D., R.N., assistant professor at the IU School of Nursing and a researcher at the Indiana University Melvin and Bren Simon Cancer Center, and colleagues studied two different treatment options for [breast cancer](#) survivors because they often report problems with memory or feelings of mental slowness, which can lead to depression, anxiety, fatigue and an overall poorer quality of life. These symptoms can be severe and may persist after [cancer treatment](#) ends.

To date, there have been very few treatment options available for patients to deal with these problems. The IU researchers compared no treatment to two different training programs.

The results, recently published in the journal [Breast Cancer Research and Treatment](#), showed that a [memory training](#) program improved memory performance, while a program called Insight, developed by Posit Science, improved both [memory performance](#) and the ability and speed in which the survivors processed information.

Memory training, for example, involved teaching participants strategies for remembering word lists, sequences and text material. Insight is a computer program in which [study participants](#) followed a series of progressively more difficult information tasks. "These results are

encouraging in that both training programs led to positive improvements for breast cancer survivors. The results suggest that the Insight program may have a greater impact on these women," Dr. Von Ah said. "Even though this was the largest cognitive training study in breast cancer survivors, we need to confirm our findings in a larger study."

The study included 82 [breast cancer survivors](#) who reported concerns about their cognitive function, such as [poor memory](#) and mental slowness. All of the women had undergone chemotherapy. Each woman completed cognitive assessments prior to, immediately after, and two months after training.

The study was supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Nurse Faculty Scholar Program, an American Cancer Society Institutional Research Grant, the IU School of Nursing Center for Enhancing Quality of Life in Chronic Illness, and the Mary Margaret Walther Program of the Walther Cancer Institute. Co-authors included the following IU Simon Cancer Center researchers: Janet S. Carpenter, Ph.D., R.N., and Michael Weaver, Ph.D., R.N., both of the IU School of Nursing; Andrew Saykin, Psy.D., Patrick Monahan, Ph.D., Bryan Schneider, M.D., Fred Unverzagt, Ph.D., and Jingwei Wu, M.S., of the IU School of Medicine; Menggang Yu, Ph.D., of the University of Wisconsin; George Rebok, Ph.D., of Johns Hopkins University; and Karlene Ball, Ph.D., of the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Provided by Indiana University School of Medicine

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