

UCSF Health

Brain Tumor Center

Caring for Mind, Body, and Spirit: Managing Cognitive Changes

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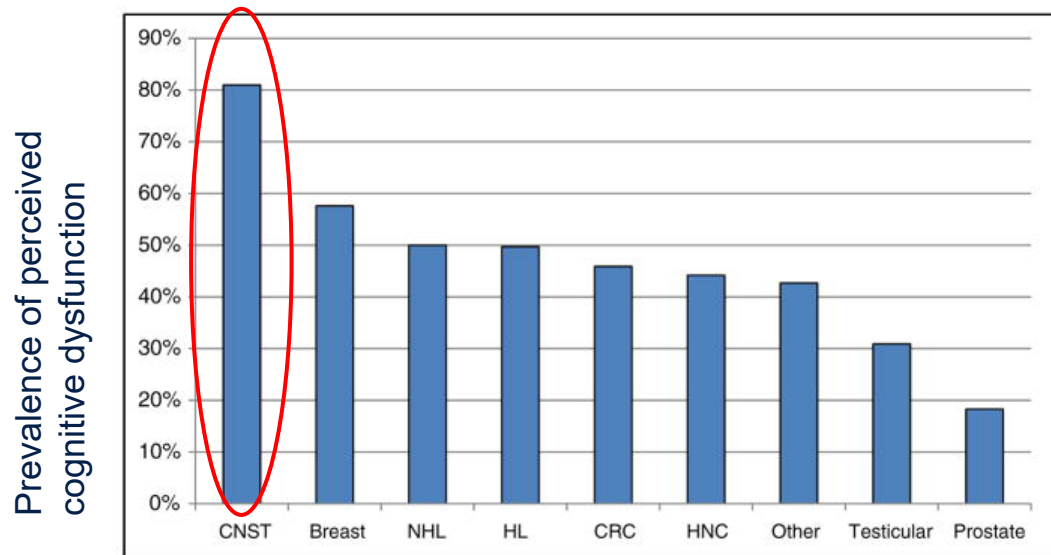
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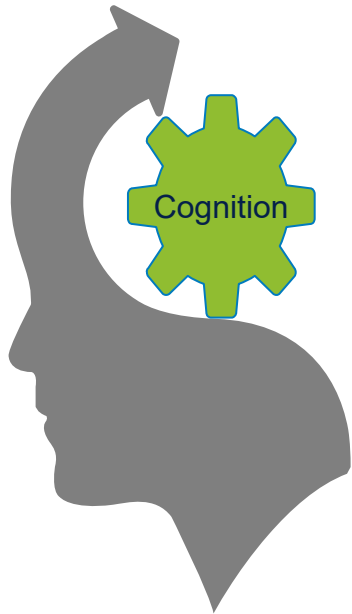
Thinking difficulties are common in cancer



Schmidt JE, et al.. *J Cancer Surviv.* 2016;10(2):302-311.
Tucha et al. *Neurosurgery.* 2000; 47(2):324-334.

- Common in cancer
- Thinking problems differ depending on cancer type.

Thinking difficulties can change over time



- Forgetfulness and other thinking changes can occur at the time of diagnosis, during treatment, and/or even several months to years after treatment
- Course can depend on many factors
- As thinking problems change, we also need to changed the way we address it

Do cancer and cancer treatments cause thinking problems?

Cancer in the brain:

- Location of tumor
- Rate of tumor growth
- Effects on surrounding brain tissue (compression, displacement, or infiltration)



Treatment Effects:

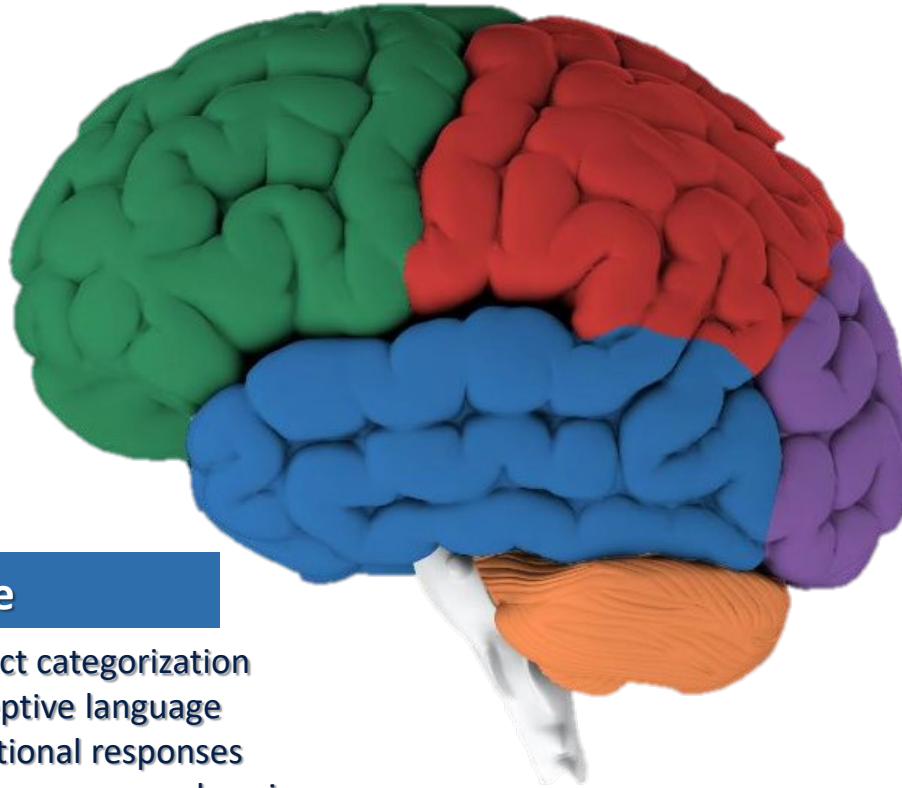
- Surgical resection
- Radiation treatment
- Chemotherapy
- Medications (e.g. corticosteroids and anti-epileptics)

Frontal Lobe

- Emotional control
- Behavioral control
- Verbal expression
- Problem Solving
- Decision Making
- Social control
- Motivation
- Attention

Temporal Lobe

- Memory
- Face recognition
- Selective attention
- Locating objects
- Object categorization
- Receptive language
- Emotional responses
- Language comprehension



Parietal Lobe

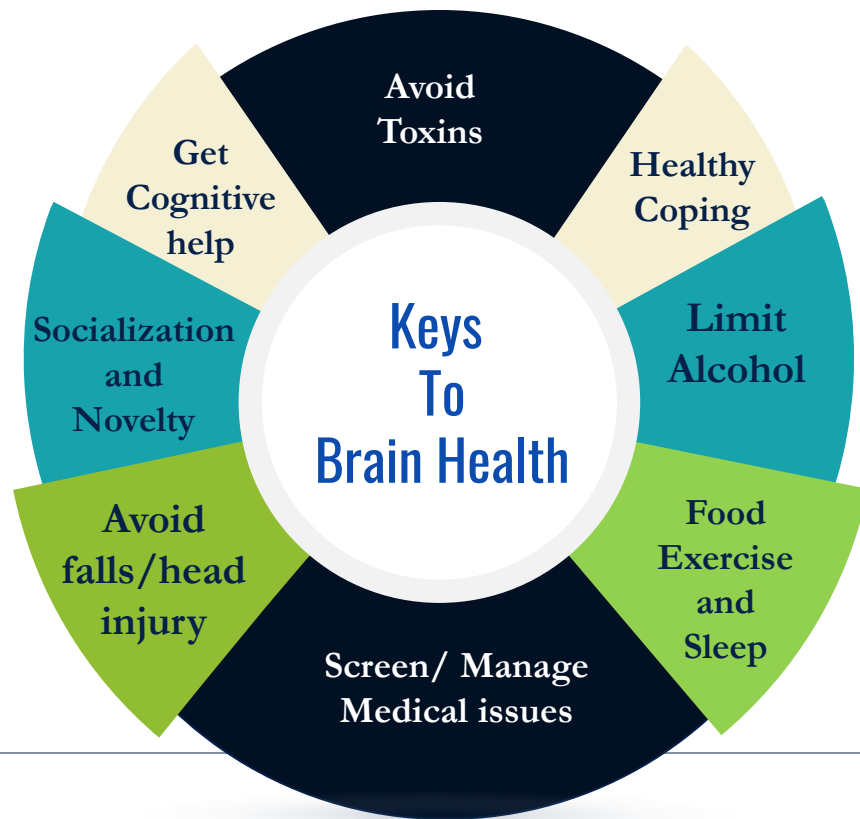
- Tactile performance
- Spatial orientation
- Academic skills
- Object naming
- Visual attention
- Eye-hand coordination

Occipital Lobe

- Visual stimuli processing

What are some things I can do to help reduce cognitive risks and thrive ?

How can I reduce risk to my brain?



Yeah, but what do I do if I already struggle cognitively?

Initial Guiding Principles

- Managing fatigue / overwhelm and sleep
- Develop and implement systems to help you get things done
- Be present during tasks and learn from both successes and challenges
- Consider feedback from others

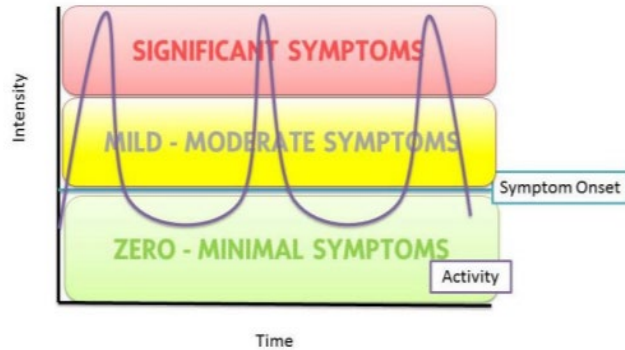


Other ways to sharpen your thinking

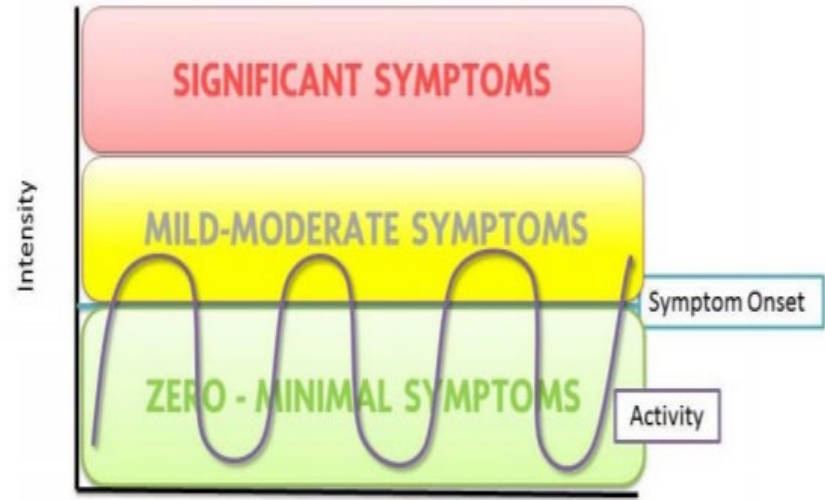
- Pace yourself
- Reduce overstimulation
- Organizational strategies and apps

Pacing is critical for better thinking stamina!

Overdoing = Fatigue

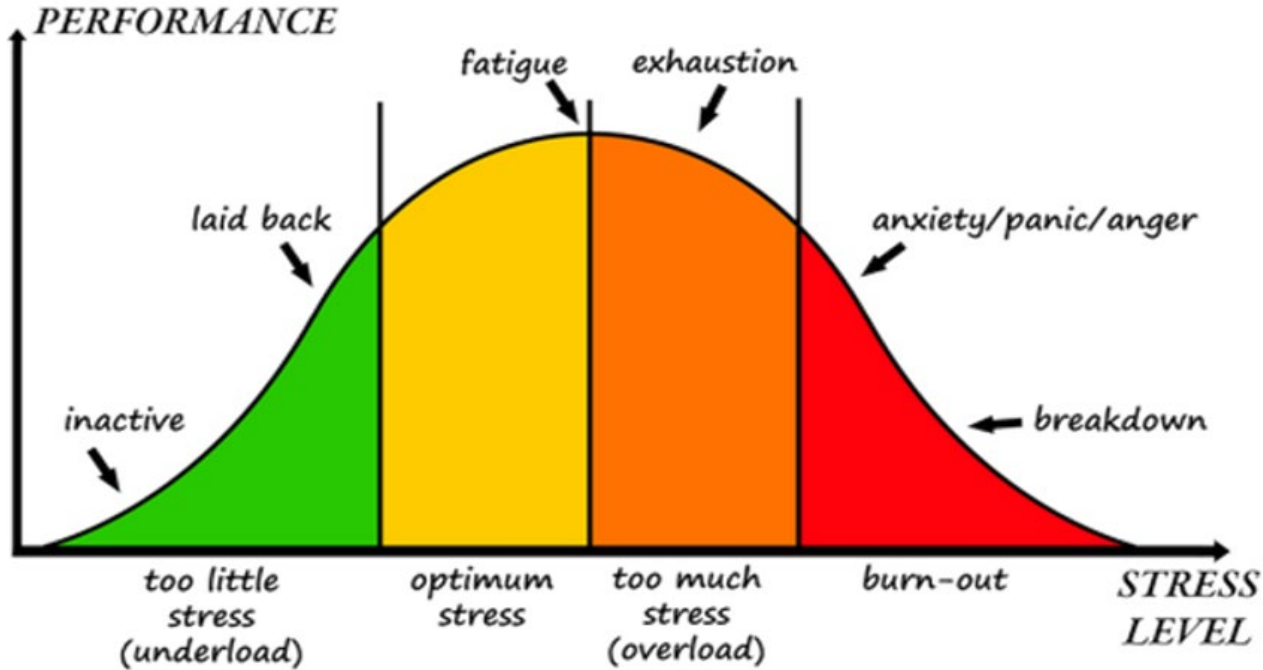


Pacing self = Better stamina



STRESS CURVE

How much you get done

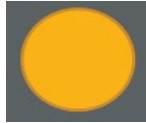


How much fatigue and stress you feel

Consider managing your energy like a stop light:



Green = Go!



Yellow = Yield (slow down)



Red = Stop!



Prevent overstimulation as a way to manage cognitive symptom flares

> Environmental overstimulation
=
> Cognitive symptoms



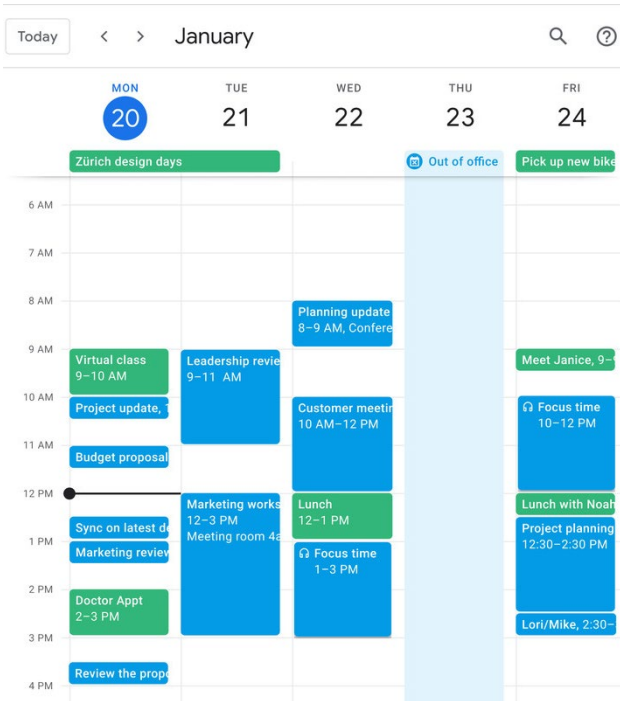
Getting things done!

Organizational tools – keys to success

- Have a system and work your system!
- Consistency over optimization
- Consider warning alarms
- Overwhelmed? Break it down
- Don't keep it in your head
- Preplan and prepare in advance to reduce time pressure
- Reduce clutter (sound and visual)



Organizational tools: The basics



Calendar with reminders



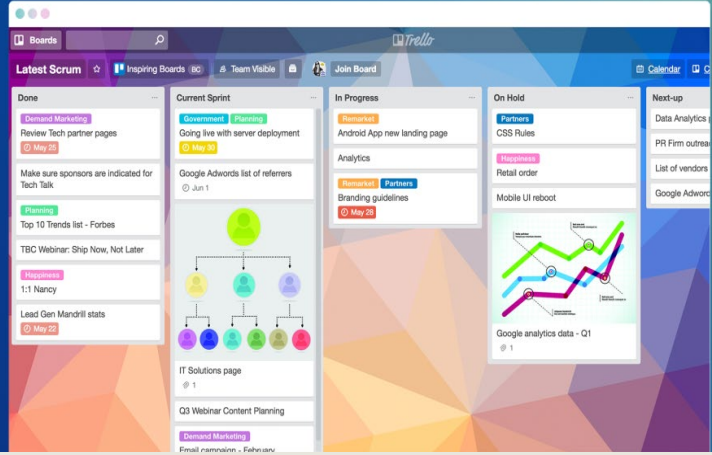
Otter: Voice to text app



Fabulous: Daily routine

Organizational tools: To-do list basics

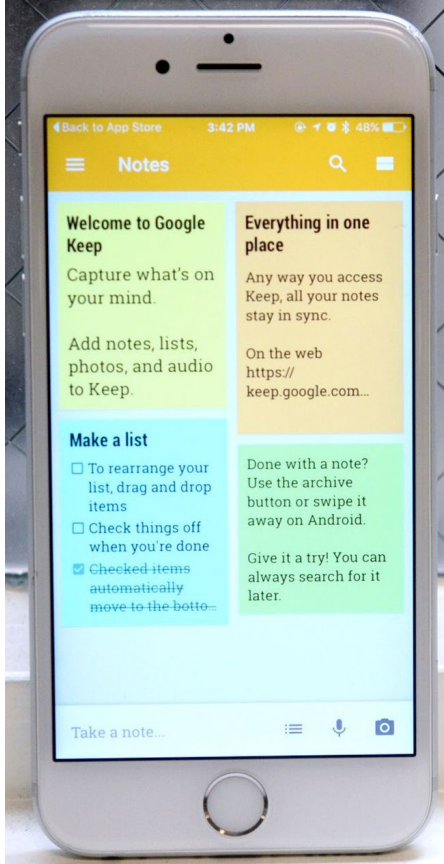
Keep track of ongoing projects with a single view



Trello for project planning



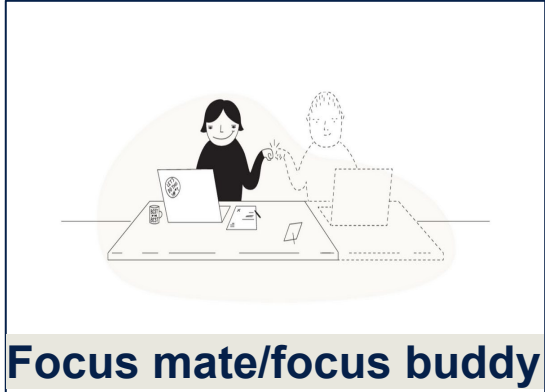
Paper To do list sorted by urgency



Google Keep

What else can I do to get more things done?

Boost your productivity!



Focus mate/focus buddy

1. Tackle your inbox at set times.

Don't waste time by checking your e-mail too frequently —then falling down the Internet black hole. Set an alarm, and dive into your unread folder each time it goes off. Add each task to your to-do list, reply to confirm you will take care of it, and archive the message.

2. Get physically active before tackling a boring task.

Walking up and down a few flights of stairs, doing a crossword puzzle, or playing Candy Crush for 15 minutes enhances your executive functioning —priming you for the work ahead.

3. Boost your reading with color.

When sifting through a long report, cover the page with a sheet of transparent colored plastic to boost your comprehension. When reading digitally, use the highlighting tool.

4. Set a timer for each task.

People with ADHD often have a poor sense of time. Instead of giving yourself all day to finish that memo, allot two hours. Set a computer or phone alert.

5. List your top 10 daily to-dos.

Write them on a white board or use an app like *2Do*. If your priorities shift, alter the list with a swipe.

6. Reserve 15 minutes each day to clear your desk and organize your paperwork.

Avoid “buried desk” syndrome this way. If you wait to get organized “later,” it will never happen.

7. Log deadlines in Google Calendar.

Count backward from each project's due date, and set email reminders when intermediate stages must be completed.

8. Take copious notes in meetings.

This not only helps you focus, but also provides an outlet for restlessness. If your handwriting is messy, ask to bring your laptop.

9. Keep a record of all requests.

People with ADHD don't always remember spoken instructions. Write it down, or log it in your phone, where the “sticky note” can't get lost.

10. Limit your availability.

Make it clear to co-workers that you can't be disturbed outside of your prearranged “office hours.”

THE POMODORO TECHNIQUE[®]

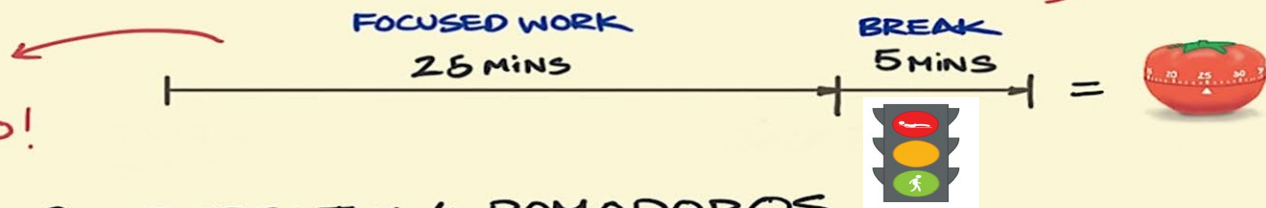
A SIMPLE METHOD TO BALANCE FOCUS WITH DELIBERATE BREAKS



- 1 PLAN YOUR TASKS
How many pomodoros might you need?
- 2 DO 1 POMODORO
Time for 25 mins then take a 5 min break

NO SNEAKY WORKING!

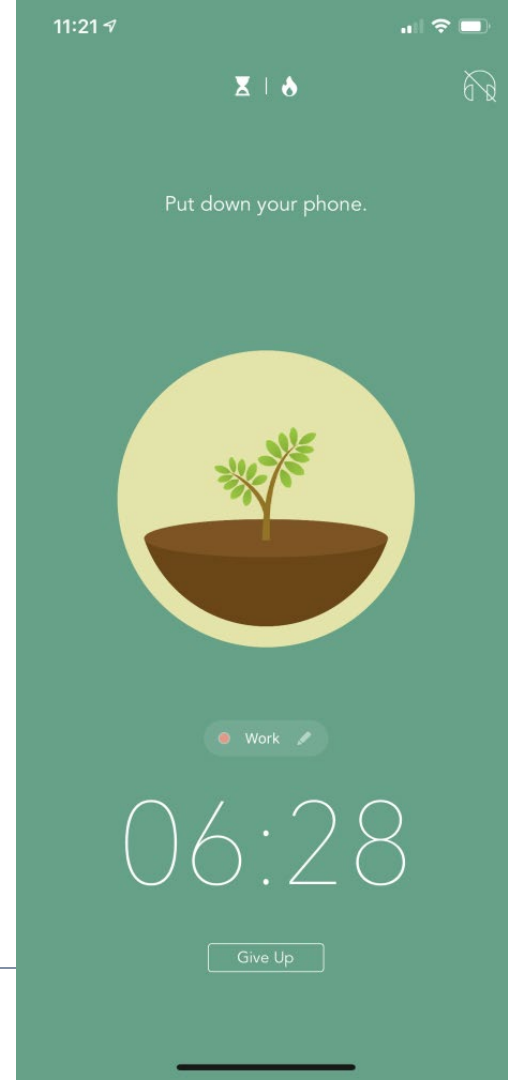
PROTECT YOUR POMODORO!



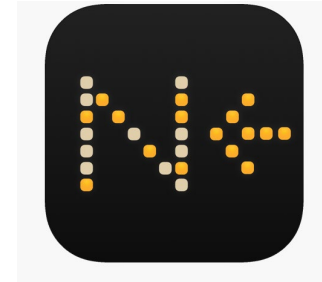
- 3 REPEAT x 4 POMODOROS
Then take a longer break



What are some apps that can help me with Pomodoro?



Other Helpful apps



**Okay, I have done everything I can think of,
but I need more help**

Reasons to see a neuropsychologist

**Understand
and treat
thinking/mood
changes**

**Track thinking
changes**

**Disability app.,
capacities for
self care,
returning to
work and/or
school**

**Understanding
types of help
needed at
home**

What will I learn from a neuropsychological evaluation?

- **A neuropsychological evaluation should provide you with:**
 - A better understanding of your brain's strengths and challenges
 - Information for your doctor and care team that will guide your treatment plan
 - Recommendations for your day-to-day life that will help you and your family members
 - Recommendations to help you succeed in school or work or to live independently

- Cognitive changes are common and multi-determined
- Managing fatigue, exercise, healthy diet, and having emotional support is important
- Track what works to help manage your cognitive changes
- Cognitive rehabilitation has been found to be helpful to manage cognitive symptoms but may not be a fit for everyone
- Consider talking with your care team about possible resources and cognitive care providers





Thank you!

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