

## Brain Fog

*The Foundation thanks Elaine Alexander, MD, PhD, clinician and researcher in Sjögren's syndrome, biomedical consultant and Chair-Elect of the Sjögren's Foundation Medical and Scientific Advisory Board, San Diego, California, for authoring this Patient Education Sheet.*

**What is Brain Fog?** Brain Fog is a lay term to describe fluctuating mild memory loss that is inappropriate for a person's age. It may include forgetfulness, spaciness, confusion, decreased ability to pay attention, an inability to focus, and difficulty in processing information. Remember that gradual cognitive decline from early adulthood is a fact of life. Brain Fog can occur in Sjögren's, but other factors might cause these symptoms and should be considered by you and your doctor.

### What YOU can do about Brain Fog:

- ▶ Manage your lifestyle to optimize your health and sense of well-being.
- ▶ Develop a close working relationship with your doctor(s):
  - Always report changes in cognition/memory and mood (depression, anxiety).
  - Make sure your physician knows about all the prescription and OTC medications you are taking. Especially in patients over 65-70 years of age, a major cause of cognitive dysfunction can be side effects of drugs and drug interactions.
  - Inquire about your hormonal status, thyroid function, and blood pressure.
- ▶ Additional actions:
  - Rejuvenate with sufficient sleep. If after 8-9 hours of sleep you are still tired, tell your doctor.
  - Minimize stress and anxiety:
    - Set realistic expectations
    - Plan ahead
    - Take breaks throughout the day
    - Learn relaxation exercises and practice them at regular intervals
    - Balance work and leisure
    - Let yourself laugh
    - Talk about feelings
    - Limit multi-tasking and focus on one task at a time
  - Reduce caffeine and alcohol.
  - Manage musculoskeletal and joint pain effectively.
  - Exercise regularly. Adequate physical exercise enhances cognition/memory.
  - **Train the Brain!** "If you don't use it, you will lose it."
  - Boost your brain power: Continue to work into retirement (part time), learn new skills, volunteer, engage in social and mentally stimulating activities, and establish new friendships and relationships.
  - Take your body to the gym and don't forget to visit the "BRAIN SPA" – both will improve brain function.
  - **Recent scientific data show that longevity is associated with the successful management of chronic diseases, such as Sjögren's, not the absence of any disease!**
- ▶ Suggested reading: *The Memory Bible*, by Gary Small, MD, Director of the UCLA Center on Aging, available from the Sjögren's Foundation.