**Got Brain Fog Lately? Blame It On The Coronavirus Pandemic**

*Read this if you’ve been losing track of time, forgetting things or haven’t been able to concentrate*

**By Julia Ries**

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Human beings are built to be able to quickly adapt to new environments and situations. But even with our magnificent ability to adjust, it doesn’t happen instantaneously. The changes the pandemic brought on — the stay-at-home orders, extensive social distancing measures — were abrupt and intense, and have tested us mentally, emotionally, even physically.

People are feeling [stuck and isolated](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/loss-of-spontaneity-mental-health_l_5ece8e6dc5b61ed67edd69c1), [anxious and unsure about the future](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/social-distancing-long-term-effect-mental-health-therapists_l_5ebaeb61c5b6894ab8b8f53f). And on top of all that, people feel loopy. Days blend into one another, time is lost. [Brain fog](https://twitter.com/bvfsqre/status/1268477372744990723) is slowing us down and we’re feeling less sharp. We may be forgetting normal words that are part of our vocabulary or struggling with stringing sentences together.

Quarantine brain (or [quarantine cobwebs](https://twitter.com/lizzynotzed/status/1265697818829709312) as some are [calling it](https://twitter.com/MarqJacobs/status/1267494861353021445)) is your brain’s normal response to a very abnormal situation. Here’s why you might be feeling kind of loopy right now:

**We’re lacking stimulation**

No matter where you live — whether you’re still mostly staying at home in California or New York, or you’re out and about in recently reopened states like South Carolina or Texas — the pandemic continues to disrupt our lives.

We’re unable to do many of the activities we’re accustomed to doing, and are consequently missing out on all the stimulation that typically keeps our brains active and engaged.

“When we are in our homes, not getting out and about, our brains don’t have to work as hard since we’re not noticing things and interpreting things in the environment,” said Sherry Benton, a psychologist and the founder of [TAO Connect](https://www.taoconnect.org/), an organization that helps make therapy more accessible.

Benton likened this process to that of a broken bone: If you broke your arm and put it in cast, your surrounding muscles would weaken and you’d have to do some physical therapy when the cast came off to restrengthen your muscles. It’s similar with the brain.

“Our brains are going through a similar process, atrophying a bit by staying at home and needing some good, diverse focused stimulation to get back in shape,” Benton said.

[Paraskevi Noulas](https://nyulangone.org/doctors/1912230038/paraskevi-noulas), a psychologist and clinical assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry at NYU Langone Health, said if we’re looking at and doing the same things every day (which many of us are forced to do right now), there’s not much keeping our minds active and our neurons firing.

“Without that external and internal input to feed our interests, to learn and grow, our brain shuts down,” Noulas said.

**We’re experiencing chronic stress**

Joe Salinas, a sensory neurologist and assistant professor of neurology at NYU Langone, said the constant influx of stress is also impacting our ability to think clearly and critically.

We’ve now been battling high levels of persistent stress for months. Salina said when stress becomes chronic — and we’re unable to give our bodies and minds a break — it can take a serious toll on our blood vessels, heart and brain, and increase our risk for cognitive impairment.

Usually, the brain calms down and decompresses in between stressors, but stressors are currently coming in such rapid succession that our brains don’t have time to recover, Benton explained.

“After some time, the hippocampus [the part of the brain involved with memory and learning] stops functioning efficiently. As a result, we find it difficult to take in information and recall information,” Benton said. This hurts our memory, concentration and critical thinking skills. No wonder we’re feeling so loopy and out of it.

According to Salines, our circumstances are changing more suddenly and at a larger scale than any other point in our lifetime. Our brain is on guard for the next problem.

“Our brain has likely shifted its focus from creativity and long-term thinking to the day-to-day urgency of survival, protection and anticipation of the next relevant threat, using these pain-related signals and emotions,” Salinas said.

Stress and a lack of stimulation are likely affecting your cognitive functions. But there are simple ways you can boost your brain power right now.

**How to boost your brain power**

Being isolated and stagnant for an extended period of time is not conducive to our health, Noulas said. The longer the limitations and restrictions on our lives persist, the more prone people will become to distress, sadness, emotional numbness — and brain fog. Human beings are meant to be active.

If you’re still doing most of your activities from home, Noulas recommended creating a schedule and routine to help combat the stagnation.

“Wherever you are, creating an active routine is key to combatting brain fog,” she said. “When you’re stuck at home, you have to find ways to stimulate your mind and get those creative juices flowing.”

Also: exercise (walk, jog, run, lift weights — anything to get your body moving). “I can’t emphasize enough how much of a significant difference this makes for our overall health,” Noulas said.

She also recommended doing puzzles and playing games to keep your mind sharp. “The brain is a muscle that needs to be exercised just like our body,” Noulas said.

Talk to friends and family virtually, cook and bake, get into gardening. Give your brain the challenges it craves, and give it time to rest. Pay attention to your brain, and to how you’re feeling.

“Do what you need to do so you can get your brain back to being able to focus, function, and rest at its best,” Salinas said.