

The Empowered Caregiver

Together With You on Your Ceresti-Caregiver Journey



FEATURED ARTICLE

May is National Stroke Awareness Month

Knowledge is power, especially when it comes to reducing your risk for stroke. Increasing awareness and education helps people learn about the risks so they can do everything in their power to reduce them.

The National Institutes of Health reports that a stroke occurs every 40 seconds in the U.S. causing a death every 4 minutes. This makes it a leading cause of death and disability in the U.S.

Stroke happens when the brain is deprived of blood and nutrients. This can be caused by plaque in the arteries leading to the brain resulting in narrowing or blockage of the arteries. It can also be caused by bleeding in the brain caused by an artery that bursts (aneurysm) or a traumatic brain injury. A lack of blood and nutrients causes brain cells to begin dying within minutes. That's why, when symptoms present themselves, it's so important to receive prompt treatment to minimize brain damage and potential complications.

The signs of stroke can be more easily remembered by using the acronym FAST.

- **F**ace drooping
- **A**rm weakness
- **S**lurring of speech
- **T**ime to call 911

These symptoms can also be caused by a *Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA)*. A TIA is caused by smaller, more temporary interruptions of blood flow. A TIA may or may not leave lasting damage that can result in loss of function or skills. Even though symptoms may resolve, a TIA is still a medical emergency so immediate medical attention is essential.

The following six risk factors for stroke can't be controlled, but it's important to know what they are:

- **Age** – Stroke-risk increases with age, doubling each decade over age 55.
- **Genes** – If an immediate family member had a stroke, your risk may be higher.
- **Race** – The risk of death from a stroke is higher among African Americans. This may be because of a higher incidence of contributing risk factors like diabetes, high cholesterol and obesity.
- **Gender** – Women have more strokes and are more likely to die from strokes than men. This could be because a woman's life expectancy is longer, therefore a stroke is likely to happen at an older age. Other gender-related factors that increase risk of stroke for women include

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pregnancy, preeclampsia and oral contraceptive use (especially when combined with smoking.)

- **Prior stroke or TIA** – A person with a history of stroke or TIA is about ten times more likely to have another.
- **Previous heart attack** – This indicates that there may be plaque buildup within the blood vessels of the heart. That same type of plaque can also block the blood vessels leading to the brain, causing a stroke.

Fortunately, there are lifestyle modifications that we can adjust to reduce the risks for stroke. The American Heart Association recommends:

- Don't smoke
- Exercise regularly
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Maintain healthy cholesterol levels
- Maintain a healthy blood pressure
- Maintain healthy blood sugar levels

Stay aware of your own risks for stroke and empower yourself by modifying your lifestyle choices so you can reduce those risks and stay brain-healthy.

To find out more about brain health and supporting those with stroke and other brain health issues, please go to brainhealth.ceresti.com.

By Marilyn Abrahamson - Brain-Health Education Specialist at Ceresti Health.

CALMING THE CAREGIVER MIND

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF!

Regardless of how much you've given of yourself, you may still tell yourself you could have given more. These belief systems often lead to negative self-talk, causing you to feel inadequate.

Try the following technique to turn those thoughts around.

- *Accentuate the positive!* Grab a notebook and list the things that you handled well that day. Write down your mistakes as well - *and remember that you're human*. Mistakes are there to teach us something - and then, you can do better next time.
- *For those things you felt you could have done better - tomorrow is another day.* Keep your thoughts in the present rather than feeling guilty about the past or worrying about the future. Write down the things you'd like to improve upon, then **choose only one** to work on each day.

Regardless of what's on your list, *believe in yourself!* Everyone needs validation, so reach out to a trusted friend or relative for the love, support and appreciation you deserve.

It's natural for the mind to stray toward negative thoughts. What's most important is to acknowledge when it happens and find ways to gain perspective so you can continue to have compassion, not only for those you're caring for, but also for yourself.

For more information about brain health or caregiver support please visit the **Ceresti Brain Health Education portal** at brainhealth.ceresti.com and enter code **MSHO2022**.

Meet Cheryl!



Hello! I'm Cheryl Laux and I've been a Ceresti Caregiver Coach since December 2021. I feel privileged to be a part of something that is so beneficial for family caregivers.

I graduated from Bowling Green State University with a Bachelor's Degree in Child and Family Development and for the first eight years of my career, I worked with Children's Services.

After that, I continued my work as a Social Worker in a nursing home in my own community. During my twenty seven years there, I became focused on the residents in the memory-care community. There, I discovered my passion for helping people navigate their dementia journey. I continue to feed that passion today with the Ceresti Caregivers and their families.

I live in Ohio with my husband and daughter, who will be attending college in September. I also have two older children and a grandson that is the light of my life. We love camping, cycling, riding my husband's motorcycle and traveling.

It's been gratifying to see how much family-caregivers gain by engaging in the Ceresti Caregiver Support Program as well as with their Caregiver Coaches. It's wonderful to be able to empower people with the knowledge, support, and the tools to help them succeed as compassionate, confident and knowledgeable Ceresti Caregivers.

Redecorate Your Desk

Neurobics is a brain workout you can do anywhere, anytime. For an activity to be *Neurobic*, all you have to do is change your routines and your brain will remain switched-on!

Let's start at your desk, whether at your work or home office. Simply rearrange your desktop and other items, like your trash can and stapler to keep your brain guessing.

How does rearranging your desk change your brain?

Whenever you reach for something, your brain consults the "spatial map" created in your brain from habit, helping you locate things without having to think. From this map, you automatically know where to find your stapler and your mouse - and you can toss papers into the trash without looking.

Moving things around will hamper your ability to reach for them without thinking. Focus and attention will become activated so you can find what you need and your brain will update those spatial maps.

You'll quickly notice your brain adjusting to the new locations, allowing you to more-quickly find things more easily with practice.

This adjustment is called neuroplasticity! It's your brain's ability to adapt and change with new learning and experiences - that's what keeps your brain working at its best.

Give this *Neurobic* workout a try next time you use your desk. And, look for more *Neurobic* workouts in future issues of this newsletter.

For more knowledge about your brain, visit **Ceresti's Brain Health Education Portal**. Go to brainhealth.ceresti.com. To register, use the code **MSHO2022**.

**All of the Neurobic exercises in the Time Out for Fitness section of the The Empowered Caregiver Newsletters are based on excerpts from the book "Keep Your Brain Alive" by Dr. Lawrence Katz and Manning Rubin. Workman Publishing, New York.*



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As a supplemental benefit of the Blue Plus SecureBlueSM (HMO SNP) health plan, you have access to a caregiver support program available through Ceresti Health at no cost to you.
To determine if you are eligible for this program, contact: (877) 222-5055.

REDUCE YOUR RISKS - IMPROVE YOUR BRAIN

Want to Reduce Your Risks? Reduce Your Stress

Research has shown that chronic or prolonged stress can be a factor in hastening age-related cognitive decline and even for increasing the risk for developing a memory disorder like Alzheimer's Disease or another type of dementia.

That's because the stress hormone **cortisol** - a hormone released when you're experiencing chronic stress - is associated with problems with memory. Chronic stress can also negatively impact the immune system, which can also increase dementia risk, as well as contribute to anxiety and dementia.

Managing stress in daily life

Although it's not realistic to think that all sources of stress can be eliminated from your life, adopting stress management techniques and coping mechanisms can be effective for calming daily tension and anxiety. Having a daily stress-management routine may be an important part of supporting your healthy brain and lowering your risks age-related memory changes.

Here are some daily habits that can be a part of your daily stress management routine:

Become more social: When you're socially engaged, you're setting yourself up for more fun, more intellectual stimulation and lower stress. Becoming more active in your community, volunteering and getting to know your neighbors are excellent ways to expand your social horizons.

Sleep well: Getting enough good quality sleep is essential for brain health. When sleep deprivation becomes chronic, it is associated with slower mental energy and function as well as increased risk for memory disorders. To improve sleep, strive for consistent bedtimes and wake-up times, avoid blue-light from screens before going to bed and keep the bedroom dark and cool.

Adopt daily rituals to calm your mind: Make it a daily habit to engage in one or two stress-relieving activities such as deep-breathing, meditation, yoga or even taking a daily walk outside in nature either alone or with a friend.

AVOID watching or reading too much news if you find that it causes you to feel anxious: It's important to remain well-informed, but watching or reading too much of the news can negatively impact mental health, especially if it is particularly troubling to you. If watching or reading the news causes feelings of helplessness, sadness or anxiety, it's okay to turn it off for a couple of days. When you return to it, just watch or read what you need to remain informed.

Find time to laugh: There are few things in life that make you feel better and more relaxed than a good belly laugh. Spend time with friends, watch a favorite movie or video or read an amusing book or article - it doesn't matter what you do, as long as it lights up your sense of humor.