

Your Mind Matters

Preserve Your Brain Health for Your Best Life



FEATURED ARTICLE

May is National Stroke Awareness Month

A little awareness can make a huge difference!

May is *National Stroke Awareness Month* in the U.S. Increasing awareness helps us learn about the risks so we can do everything in our power to reduce them.

The National Institutes of Health reports that a stroke occurs every forty seconds in the U.S. and every four minutes, someone loses their life to a stroke, making it a leading cause of death and disability.

Stroke is caused by a lack of blood and nutrients to the brain. This causes brain cells to begin dying within minutes. That's why it's so important to seek treatment right away to minimize brain damage and other 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 indicate that a *Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA)* has occurred. A *TIA* - some may refer to this as a *mini-stroke* - is caused by smaller, more temporary interruptions of blood flow that may or may not leave lasting brain damage and loss of function or skills. It is still a medical emergency so immediate medical attention is essential.

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

- **Age** – The risk for having a stroke increases with age, doubling each decade over age 55.
- **Genes** – If an immediate family member had a stroke, your risk may be higher.

FEATURED ARTICLE

Continued from Page 1

- **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 have more serious complications 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 pregnancy and oral contraceptive use (especially when combined with smoking.)
- **Prior history of stroke or TIA** – A person with a history of stroke or TIA is about ten times more likely to have another.
- **Previous heart attack** – A previous heart attack means that there may be a buildup of plaque 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.

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

- Don't smoke
- Exercise regularly
- Eat a healthy diet

The bottom line: *Do your best to maintain a healthy weight, cholesterol levels, blood pressure and blood sugar levels.*

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

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

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

TAKE CARE OF YOU

TAKE TIME TO DECOMPRESS

Before you start your day or switch to a new activity, take a moment to decompress. Let go of the stress so you can start fresh.

Try sitting in stillness for two or three minutes and doing a deep breathing exercise. Listen to a few minutes of soft, calming music. Fit a few minutes of stretching into your day.

People think self-care has to be lavish or expensive. Sometimes, it's just about giving something back - **to 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**.

MEMORY TIP OF THE MONTH

Eat a Handful of Walnuts

Walnuts are not only delicious and nutritious, they're great for your brain - and **they literally look like a brain!**

Walnuts offer a healthy dose of the fiber, fats, vitamins and minerals that your body and brain needs to function properly every day. Let's get more specific:

- Walnuts are rich in antioxidants and Vitamin E that help to reduce bad cholesterol.
- They are a higher source of Omega 3 fatty acids than any other nut. Omega 3 fatty acids are essential for heart and brain health and a nutrient that you can only get from food.
- They can reduce inflammation, which can contribute to the cause of many diseases, including Alzheimer's disease and some kinds of cancers.
- They promote gut health. The gut-brain connection is so important because an unhealthy gut can contribute to inflammation and disease throughout the body. Eating a healthy handful of walnuts each day may be one way to support your gut-health.

So, take a brain-health minute and enjoy some walnuts!



GROW YOUR BRAIN

You Can Count on It!

We use all of our five senses to get information from the world around us, but it's *vision* that we rely on the most. We look, even when we don't need to in order to accomplish a task.

When we touch something, *seeing it with our eyes* helps to identify the subtle differences between objects such as coins, for example. That's why it's so important to maximize our sense of touch and we can do this with ****Neurobic exercises**, which are a great way to light up brain-pathways that we often neglect.

Can our sense of touch be improved?

Connections in the brain that are responsible for any skill can become stronger by practicing, using and reusing those brain regions over and over again. Those connections responsible for your sense of touch are no exception.

Here's how you can improve your sense of touch in 4 simple steps:

1. Put some spare change in a cup or in your pocket.
2. Without looking, feel the coins by running your fingers through the coins, then choose one.
3. Using touch alone (*do not look at the coin*), run your fingertips over all of the surfaces of the coin, trying to identify it. Once you identify the coin, look at it and see if you're correct and return it to the cup or to your pocket.
4. Choose a new coin and do it again.

Doing this exercise will help light up the pathways in your brain that are associated with the sense of touch, making your fingertips more sensitive to subtle details and patterns.

Challenging your brain in ways that cause you to use neglected pathways in the brain is what keeps it strong and vital. Give this one a try!

***Neurobics** are exercises for the brain designed to create new neural pathways in the brain by using the senses in unconventional ways. In other words, you'll want to choose a hobby that is different and new to you, so you can learn from it.

****All of the Neurobic exercises in the Grow Your Brain section of the Your Mind Matters 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.

MONTHLY BRAIN CHALLENGE

Hink Pink



The clues offered below represent rhyming word pairs called **Hink Pink**. The first one is done for you and the answers are provided below if you need them.

1. Joking Rabbit (Funny Bunny)
2. Basement Resident
3. Bogus Brook
4. Bashful Lad
5. Tranquil Matriarch
6. Timid Fellow
7. Large Toupee
8. Lawful Hawk
9. Giant Vehicle
10. Lethargic Flower

ANSWERS

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 1. Funny Bunny | 6. Shy guy |
| 2. Cellar Dweller | 7. Big Wig |
| 3. Fake Lake | 8. Legal Eagle |
| 4. Coy boy | 9. Big Rig |
| 5. Calm mom | 10. Lazy Daisy |