

# The Empowered Caregiver

Together With You on Your Ceresti-Caregiver Journey



## FEATURED ARTICLE

### October is National Depression and Health Screening Month

As we recognize *National Depression and Health Screening Month* this October, it's vital that we acknowledge an important fact: *Family caregivers have a higher risk for developing depression than their counterparts who are not caring for a loved one.*

Sadness and depression are two different things. It's normal to feel sadness if you lose a friend or if you are given upsetting news. But thoughts of hopelessness or of harming oneself, or overwhelming sadness that continues for more than two weeks should spark concern. If you or someone you care about has these feelings, it should trigger an immediate call to a healthcare professional.

As you are keenly aware, family caregiving is such an intense responsibility that caregivers are more likely to ignore signs of their own physical and mental health issues.

With that in mind, it's important for you to be familiar with potential signs of depression so you know when it's time to reach out for help.

#### **Factors that can increase the risk for depression (in addition to being a family caregiver)**

- Having or developing a chronic medical condition
- A history of trauma
- Feelings of isolation or loneliness

- Drug or alcohol abuse or misuse
- Frequent occurrences of loss in your life

#### **Symptoms that may indicate depression**

- Feelings of restlessness, hopelessness or unhappiness with life, in general
- Low self-image or self-esteem
- Feelings of excessive guilt
- Apathy or loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyed
- Avoidance of social activities
- Trouble sleeping
- Unexplained fatigue
- Problems with concentration and memory
- Fluctuations in either gaining or losing weight
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide

Some caregivers with depression experience symptoms and can have difficulty functioning each day as a result. However, others are able to compartmentalize their feelings and function well throughout the day, despite having symptoms. Caregivers can become experts at putting their own needs on a shelf in order to do what they need to each day.

If you are experiencing any of the above symptoms, it's important to see your doctor, even if you are able to put your feelings aside right now and provide care for your loved one.

## FEATURED ARTICLE

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### **What treatments are available?**

If you recognize symptoms of depression in yourself, first, recognize the need for help and self-care. You can begin by lightening your load. Ask for help from friends or family, or consider hiring a home care provider for a few hours a week. This will give you some time to focus on your own physical and mental health.

Even if only for a limited number of hours each week, a home health aide can help with housekeeping and food preparation. They can do laundry and food shopping. They can help with bathing, grooming and provide companionship to your loved one while you are taking care of your own needs.

Then, it's time to make an appointment with your healthcare provider. Your doctor may suggest you take an antidepressant medication combined with counseling.

Lifestyle modifications such as getting more regular exercise, going to bed earlier at night, adjusting your diet and learning how to meditate have all been shown to be helpful as well. Just do what you can at your own pace, adding these changes gradually, and you will begin to notice improvements in how you feel.

Also, the importance of building a network of family, friends and community organizations cannot be overstated. A solid foundation of support is essential to help you emerge from depression for a happier and more fulfilling life.

**You can read more about how depression affects the brain by exploring the Ceresti Brain Health Education portal and clicking on the RISKS tab. If this is your first time, go to [brainhealth.ceresti.com](https://brainhealth.ceresti.com) and use the code GIVECARE to register.**

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

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## CALMING THE CAREGIVER MIND

### CAREGIVER DEPRESSION

As discussed in this issue's *Feature Article*, **October is National Depression and Health Screening Month**, caregivers are particularly at risk for developing depression.

Whether your role as a caregiver increased gradually over time or was suddenly thrust upon you, it's natural for a jumble of emotions to begin to bubble up to the surface. But, it's important to remember that whatever feelings you have – good feelings or bad feelings – they are valid and important and must be dealt with. Otherwise, they will continue to nag at you - affecting your sleep, your stress levels, your ability to cope - so, it's essential to find productive ways to express them and deal with them in a healthier way.

Talk to your healthcare provider for a referral to a mental health professional at the first sign of depression. Find a counselor that is compassionate and understands the caregiver-experience. Also, consider joining a support group for caregivers. When you talk to others that are walking in your shoes, you're almost certainly guaranteed to learn that you're not walking alone.

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*For more information about brain health or caregiver support please visit the **Ceresti Brain Health Education portal** at [brainhealth.ceresti.com](https://brainhealth.ceresti.com) and enter code **GIVECARE**.*

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## Flip the Script - Meet Your Loved One Where They Are



Contributed by Cheryl Laux, Ceresti Coach

When conversing with a loved one living with dementia, the struggle to share information in a meaningful way can become frustrating and stressful for everyone involved. Knowing your loved one as well as you do, you're keenly aware of what information is factual and what isn't.

Your loved one may speak about a topic in a way that implies it's happening in the moment, when, in reality, a similar situation or event occurred decades ago. It's important to remember that when this happens, your loved one truly believes what they are telling you. It can be confusing, or even painful if you choose to correct or argue with them about it.

For example, consider that your loved one is worried that they're late for dinner and their mother will be upset or angry. In their own mind, they're thirteen years old and afraid they'll be in trouble if they don't immediately leave to go home.

***You have two options.***

If you correct your loved one, they may become emotional or agitated because the information you're giving them directly contradicts their beliefs. Because they truly believe what they've told you, they can become confused. They may choose not to believe you when you tell them that they're no longer thirteen years old, but eighty four, and that their mother is gone.

Worse, they may mourn their mother's death all over again.

***Or... you can flip the script.***

*Turn the conversation into a wonderful opportunity for reminiscence.*

Ask questions about the home they lived in as a child, the most delicious meals their mother cooked or about the most memorable moments spent with "Mom".

***Flipping the script*** takes the conversation in a more positive direction and can elevate your loved one's mood as well. It may be a skill that you'll need to practice, but is well-worth the time and effort to do so.

Best of all, it will help you to ***meet your loved one where they are***, rather than trying to bring them back to a reality that doesn't exist for them.

Once you master this skill, your interactions will be more pleasant and less stressful for both you and your loved one.

***Have a wonderful autumn filled with love!!!***



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## TIME OUT FOR BRAIN FITNESS

# Ten Neurobic Exercises You Can Do Every Day

**Neurobics** is a brain workout you can do anywhere, anytime. For an activity to be *Neurobic*, all you have to do is do it differently than you normally do. This will cause your brain to remain switched-on and challenged, lighting up neural pathways in your brain that have been neglected from lack of use.

Here are ten Neurobic exercises you can incorporate into everyday tasks. Challenge yourself (*and make them Neurobic*) by **using your non-dominant** hand to do them:

1. Putting toothpaste on your toothbrush
2. Brushing your teeth
3. Combing or brushing your hair
4. Stirring coffee
5. Eating with a fork
6. Cutting your food
7. Dialing a phone number
8. Using a computer mouse
9. Using the touchscreen on a smartphone or tablet
10. Writing a note or letter

Practice your neurobic exercises for at least 15 minutes each day for best results.

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