

The Empowered Care Partner

Together With You on Your Ceresti-Care Partner Journey



FEATURED ARTICLE

This Valentine's Day, Give Yourself - and Your Brain Some Love

It's February, so indulge in some self-love and take care of your brain!

Your brain makes you who you are. What could be more important than that?

So, here are 10 ways you can love your brain:

1. *Feed it what it needs!* Choose foods high in Omega 3 fatty acids like salmon and walnuts! The Mediterranean Diet offers your brain the Omega 3's it will love. For less sodium, opt for the MIND Diet, also loaded with brain-healthy nutrients. Consult your physician before making any significant dietary changes.
2. *Get off that couch!* Your fuel-greedy brain needs a constant supply of oxygen-rich blood. What better way is there to get that blood pumping than by dancing, walking, and using weights to build lean muscle. Make it fun to stay motivated, and consult your physician before beginning a new exercise program.
3. *Quit Smoking!* Research shows a clear connection between smoking and cognitive decline. People who quit smoking can reduce their risk for cognitive decline when compared to their counterparts who continue to smoke.
4. *♥ Your Heart to ♥ Your Brain* - Research confirms a direct link between cardiovascular risk factors like high blood pressure, obesity, and high cholesterol to your cognitive health. Eating right and exercising will ensure you're doing everything you can to keep your heart and brain healthy.
5. *Sleep well!* Studies show that good quality and quantity of sleep are essential to clear thinking. Sleep apnea and insomnia can cause problems with thinking, decision-making, memory and focus.
6. *Don't Worry – Be Happy!* Research confirms a link between depression and cognitive decline. If you're experiencing sadness, anxiety, anger or stress that you can't manage, see your doctor or mental health professional. It's okay to ask for help.
7. *Join the club!* Socialization is one of the keys to a healthy, happy brain. Join a club, a card game or lunch with friends. Whatever you do, find activities that are meaningful and fun.
8. *Protect your noggin!* A hard enough hit to the head may cause injury to your brain and can increase your risk for dementia in the future. Wear a helmet while riding bikes, remove fall risks in your home like throw rugs and clutter. Put down a rubber bath mat in the shower to prevent slipping.
9. *Challenge your brain!* When you exercise, you challenge your heart and muscles and they're stronger when you're finished. Your brain needs a challenge too! Do puzzles, play games, and read books. Do whatever is fun for you, but make sure that it's a challenge.
10. *Harness the power of lifelong learning!* Your brain wants information, and it wants it now. It loves information that's novel and interesting. Learning keeps us curious, motivated and excited. It doesn't matter what you choose to learn, only that it's interesting and **NEW to you.**

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You can reduce your risk for cognitive decline or even Alzheimer's Disease and other types of dementia by adjusting your lifestyle choices.

Start today because it's never too late to **LOVE YOURSELF - AND YOUR BRAIN!**

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.

REDUCE YOUR RISKS

SLEEP WELL!

Being a care partner can cause even the most relaxed person to lose sleep once in a while. However, if sleep problems become more frequent, it can affect the way you feel the next day and your ability to function properly.

Studies also show that long-term problems with sleep may increase your risk for developing health problems down the road, including memory disorders like Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia. Developing a routine of sleep-habits that enables you to get better-quality sleep - in some cases just one hour more per night - can reduce the risk for developing a memory disorder by up to 30%.

According to the National Sleep Foundation, you can optimize your sleep by following these guidelines:

- *Engage in pro-sleep habits throughout the day.* Aim to get some sunshine in the morning and build in moments of fresh air during the day, if possible. Exercise regularly during the day, but not within 4 hours of your pre-bedtime routine. Eating more lightly in the evening, avoiding foods that are heavy, bloating or acidic will reduce the risk of digestive discomfort when you're trying to sleep. If you have any pain, treat it before starting your pre-bedtime routine.
- *Craft a pre-bedtime routine.* Establish relaxing nightly rituals that help you to wind down. Take a warm bath, have a cup of chamomile tea every night at the same time. Read a lighthearted book by a soft lamp in comfortable nightclothes. Avoid screens such as televisions, computers, smartphones and tablets for at least 3 hours before bed.
- *Create a sleep-inducing bedroom.* Keep the room cool, dark and quiet as you sleep. Remove work-related or stress-inducing items like clutter, computers and papers. If pets disturb your sleep, consider moving them to a different room.
- *Establish a sleep schedule.* Go to bed at a certain time each night and awaken at the same time each morning. Try to keep that schedule consistent on the weekends, whenever possible. Certain smartphones have a "bedtime setting" that will alert you when it's time for bed and can play soothing morning alarm sounds to wake you up more gently than traditional alarm clocks.

As with all risk factors that are modifiable (under your control), making small adjustments to your lifestyle can make a big difference in your level of risk for developing health problems, including memory disorders, and will help you stay healthier, more alert and happier overall.

Sleep well!

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

RECOGNIZING CHANGE

Loss of Appetite

There are many reasons your loved one may lose their appetite.

If this is happening and it's not a typical pattern, it's important to report it to their primary care physician as a *change of condition*. Chronic loss of appetite can lead to weight loss, nutritional deficiencies, and other health issues.

Understanding some of the more common reasons for loss of appetite will not only help you identify it as soon as it happens, it will empower you to know how to appropriately respond.

Causes of loss of appetite that can be reversed with a call to the doctor

- **Dental problems:** Loose, sensitive, or painful teeth or ill-fitting dentures will affect your loved one's ability to chew and enjoy food. For sensitive teeth, there are toothpaste brands that are specifically formulated to reduce tooth sensitivity with an ingredient called *potassium-nitrate*. Loose or painful teeth can be treated by a dentist, as can poorly fitting dentures or dental bridges.
- **Reduced saliva production:** It's common for saliva production to decrease with age. This often makes it more difficult to moisten food while chewing, making swallowing some foods more uncomfortable and difficult. (Changes in swallowing will be covered more thoroughly in a future newsletter issue.) If your loved one expresses that their mouth feels dry, and that it is affecting their ability to swallow, begin by visiting their primary care physician for a review of their medications. If a medication is discovered to be the culprit, the doctor may be able to prescribe an alternative. Otherwise, he or she may be able to suggest a mouth spray, rinse or lozenge that can help keep your loved one's mouth more moist and comfortable throughout the day.
- **Depression:** Mood strongly influences appetite, particularly when depression is involved. If your loved one frequently eats alone, they may no longer associate mealtime with joy or comfort. Contact your loved one's physician to have them evaluated and, if needed, treated for depression. In addition, helping your loved one arrange for more social mealtimes may be helpful as well.
- **Constipation:** Constipation can cause a loss of appetite as food moves more slowly through the GI tract. Severe, frequent or chronic constipation can cause signals to be sent to the brain that cause disgust or even nausea at the sight of food. Unfortunately, constipation is common in seniors and can lead to other issues, such as incontinence and abdominal pain. Therefore, treating it aggressively and then maintaining a healthy schedule is best.

Your loved one's physician may initially prescribe a laxative to begin the process. Once that has been achieved, the doctor should provide you with a "maintenance" program to keep things running smoothly. Ultimately, once the gut is regulated, your loved one's appetite may return.

Causes of loss of appetite that are not reversible

- **Loss of smell and taste:** The delicious smell of food cooking is often all the appetite stimulant one needs to cause hunger pangs. Unfortunately, all our senses begin to diminish as we age. Often, loss of the sense of smell results in a loss of appetite. When smell is lost, taste follows because of the close connection between the two senses.
- **Vision loss:** Food presentation can also be a source of temptation and desire to eat. Poor vision with the inability to see the food on the plate can reduce your loved one's enjoyment, along with their desire to eat it.
- **Chronic illness:** Many types of illness that are more prevalent in seniors, such as cancer, chronic liver disease, congestive heart failure as well as the medications prescribed for them can cause stomach upset or suppress appetite, in general.
- **Problems with dexterity:** Dexterity is an important part of eating independently. Perhaps your loved one has trouble holding utensils, or they have a tremor that causes food to fall off the fork or spoon and back onto the plate, table or their lap while eating. It can be frustrating or humiliating. It can also cause meals to take longer to eat, causing food to become cold, and lose its appeal.
- **Chronic pain:** When someone is in pain, they are not likely to want to eat very much. Additionally, some pain medications can cause loss of appetite or stomach upset as well.

Overall, these are difficult issues that you may or may not be able to remediate. However, there are adaptive eating utensils that have larger grips for easier handling, there are knives that rock back and forth for easier cutting and weighted utensils that can calm a tremor.

Options for Stimulating Your Loved One's Appetite

If appetite loss and weight loss is becoming a more common issue, your loved one should be examined by their primary care physician. There are options to consider as follows:

Consider medication: The doctor may suggest an appetite stimulant. There are several options available today that can help your loved one enjoy eating again.

Create a routine: The consistency of a routine can help your loved one anticipate meals, which can stimulate the desire to eat. So, if you're the one planning your loved one's meals, it's best to serve them on a regular, predictable schedule.

Compensate: If dexterity, chewing, or swallowing are at issue, you can help by using compensatory strategies. Give your loved one adaptive utensils for dexterity or tremor. Offer softer foods for dental or swallowing problems. Offering smoothies and soups can increase nutrient intake. If your loved one has a hand tremor, serve soups in a coffee mug to make it easier to eat.

Please note: The information in this article is not intended as a substitute for medical advice. If you think your loved one is experiencing loss of appetite, it is important to contact their primary care physician immediately.



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PARTNERING IN CARE

CARE PARTNER TIPS FOR VISITS TO THE DOCTOR

A visit to the doctor can be overwhelming for anyone, especially if your loved one is living with a chronic illness. That's why it's always good to have a care partner on hand to listen and write down important information.

Here's how you can help support your loved one before, during and after a visit to the doctor.

Before:

- Help your loved one create a list of questions to ask the doctor or nurse practitioner.
- Ascertain that there is an updated list of important information, such as:
 - » Life changes (such as moving to a new residence)
 - » Documented and undocumented medical conditions
 - » Health-related changes. New or continuing symptoms
 - » Medications, both prescribed and over the counter, vitamins and supplements.
- Ask your loved one how much they would like you to be involved. Do they want you to wait in the waiting room or would they prefer you accompany them into the examining room?
- So you can be prepared to ask the right questions, ask your loved one what they ultimately need from this visit to the doctor.

During:

- Bring a notepad and write down any important information offered by the doctor or nurse practitioner. Be sure to ask for clarification when needed.
- If the doctor asks to see your loved one privately, assure them that you are available for support or to answer additional questions, if needed.
- Set up any necessary follow-up appointments, if necessary.

After:

- Make sure your loved one understands the doctor's explanations offered during the visit. You can do this by:
 - » Going through your notes together, allowing your loved one to ask questions along the way.
 - » If needed, call the doctor's office with any outstanding questions your loved one may have.
- Offer to take your loved one to the pharmacy to pick up any medications or supplies prescribed by their doctor.

Keep in mind that your loved one may no longer be able to do these things alone anymore. As a Ceresti care partner, your ongoing love and support is such a valuable part of the compassionate care you provide every day.