

The Empowered Care Partner

Together With You on Your Ceresti-Care Partner Journey



FEATURED ARTICLE

Partnering in Care with a Full-Time Job - Finding Balance

An estimated six in ten family care partners also have a full-time or part-time job.

If you are struggling to find balance, you may be wondering how long you can continue on this path. With a few adjustments, there are ways of managing both:

Tip 1 – Talk to your Employer.

- Talk about your situation in a way that lets your employer know you're committed to your job. Together, you may be able to come up with a more flexible solution, while still satisfying your responsibilities.
- Find a coworker who may be able to step in for you if you have an emergency and need to leave work in a hurry or if you have to attend a doctor's appointment.
- Explore whether your company has policies for flexible work options for caregivers. You may also have access to an employee assistance program (EAP).
- Your local agency on aging can direct you to community resources that can help. Find your area agency online at n4a.org, including the *National Association of Area Agencies on Aging*.
- In one study showed, 68% of care partners reported they had to arrange for work accommodations. These accommodations included adjusting work hours and taking time off. If your workplace is not as flexible as you need it to be, it may be time to scale back or find a more flexible work situation, perhaps a remote job or something with more flexible hours.

Tip 2 - Consider the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)

- The FMLA is a government program that, if you qualify, can allow you to take up to twelve weeks off from work per year to take care of your loved one while still getting paid, receiving your health benefits and maintaining job security. Here's what you need to know:

In order to be covered, there are stringent requirements that must be met, as follows:

- In most states, your employer must have a minimum of 50 employees. Some states will cover smaller employers.
- You must work for a government agency, elementary or secondary school.
- You must have worked there for a minimum of one year and at least 1250 hours.
- You must first use your accrued vacation and sick time.

Tip 3 – Bring support into your life. If you've ever watched someone juggle too many balls, you've also seen them drop a few. It isn't their fault; it's just not possible to keep that many balls in the air at one time for very long.

Juggling a home, a job and the responsibilities associated with being a care partner is not sustainable without a little help for your friends-and family. Asking for help is necessary for your own well-being, and for the good of your loved one. Perhaps someone can sit with your loved one one day a week, or your children or spouse can tidy your house or cook dinner so you come home to a clean home and a hot meal.

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Asking for help gets easier with practice. People genuinely want to help, but are often waiting to be asked. You owe it to yourself, your loved one, your spouse, your kids and your employer to be able to give your all every day.

Tip 4 – Take care of yourself. *Something's gotta give...* and that means that care partners often stop taking care of their own needs when their loved one's needs become the priority.

While it's true that self-care is important, it may not be easy to find-or justify the time for it. Although it is a necessity, it feels like a luxury. Without self-care, caregiver burnout can set in, which can result in issues that affect both your physical and mental health.

- Take care of yourself by eating three healthy meals a day that include a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables, whole grains (such as quinoa and brown rice) and lean protein (like chicken, eggs, fish and beans). These foods will give you energy throughout the day, rather than dips and spikes you'll have from refined sugars and processed foods.
- Exercise is important for heart health, and maintaining a healthy weight with strong muscles and bones. It's also effective for managing stress. Even exercising for just 10 minutes a day has been shown to be effective.

Regardless of your specific situation, reach out to others for help. Let family and friends know you need help, talk to your boss about any scheduling challenges you're having, and research outside help until you find a doable and affordable solution.

Imagine what even a few hours of time to yourself each week could mean for you and your life.

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

RECOGNIZING CHANGE

When Your Loved One is Coughing at Mealtime

Recognizing change in your loved one's medical condition or behavior can be easier when the changes are obvious. In some cases, that means the symptoms may have been brewing for a while. However, symptoms associated with a change in condition often begin as a subtle change, gradually increasing in frequency and severity until you can no longer ignore them.

In the case of *dysphagia* (difficulty swallowing), symptoms can appear gradually – perhaps with a little throat clearing after a sip of water that increases over time to coughing, or even choking.

We so often associate mealtime with socialization and enjoyment. When those feelings are replaced by coughing or choking, mealtime can become associated with fear and frustration. As a care partner, that can leave you feeling defeated.

It's not your fault...

Dysphagia has many causes, so it's important to learn as much about it as possible, which will help you keep your loved one safer at mealtime. Armed with knowledge, you'll more easily recognize the signs, and know what to do about them.

What is dysphagia?

Dysphagia is defined as *difficulty swallowing*. It occurs when the muscles or structures of the mouth, throat and/or esophagus do not properly function while eating or drinking. It can cause food to stay in the mouth or throat, block the windpipe (as in choking), enter the airway toward the lungs (aspiration), or block the esophagus (the tube that leads to the stomach).

Aspiration occurs when food or liquid enters the airway and passes through the vocal cords, moving toward the lungs. When food or liquid enters the lungs, a lung

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infection can occur.

Two types of lung infections caused by aspiration are:

- *Pneumonitis* is caused by inflammation occurring around a foreign object or piece of food that has entered the lungs.
- *Aspiration pneumonia* is also caused by food or liquid that has entered the lungs. It causes fever, productive cough and respiratory distress that can be serious enough to require hospitalization and possibly a ventilator.

What causes Dysphagia?

Dysphagia that appears unexpectedly is most often caused by a neurological condition such as stroke, Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Parkinson's disease (PD), amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) or various types of dementia. These conditions affect the nerves and muscles associated with swallowing and can manifest in different ways. Complaints can include difficulty moving the food from front to back, food or liquids falling out the mouth or into the throat, difficulty triggering a swallow or coughing or choking during meals. Often, with age, the esophagus (the tube leading into the stomach) can become more narrowed, causing food to feel stuck. This is called *achalasia*.

It is not enough to just diagnose a person with *dysphagia*. It's crucial to diagnose the *type of dysphagia* a person is having (oral, pharyngeal and/or esophageal dysphagia) because the type of treatment recommended is dependent upon correctly diagnosing the type of dysphagia.

The most common signs to look for are:

- Eating more slowly than usual
- Food, liquid or saliva falling or spilling from the mouth
- Food pocketing inside the cheeks after meals
- Coughing or gagging when eating or drinking
- Gurgling breath sounds during or after meals
- Weight loss and/or dehydration
- Chest congestion
- Aspiration pneumonia

What you can do

If you suspect your loved one has dysphagia, start by making an appointment with their doctor. The doctor will likely refer your loved one to a speech-language pathologist (SLP) that specializes in swallowing disorders

for a swallowing evaluation. The evaluation may include both an in-office evaluation with the SLP as well as an x-ray of your loved one's swallowing – called a modified barium swallow.

As a tip, it may be prudent for your loved one to have the modified barium swallow completed before visiting the SLP. That way, the SLP will have more information about your loved one's swallowing function before the evaluation. This will be helpful in making a correct diagnosis for a more effective and personalized treatment plan.

How you can make mealtime safer for your loved one

- Ensure that your loved one is positioned upright during meals.
- Serve only foods and liquids recommended by your loved one's SLP.
- Serve foods that are moist (such as adding gravy to meats)
- Allow ample time for meals so your loved one does not feel rushed.
- Serve meals and snacks in a distraction-free environment so your loved one can remain focused on thoroughly chewing foods and safely controlling liquids.
- Encourage your loved one to swallow everything in their mouth before taking the next bite or sip.
- Serve smaller and more frequent meals to reduce overwhelm and fatigue at mealtime.
- Some people may do better with finger foods than those that require utensils.
- Patiently allow your loved one to take their time and offer as much autonomy as possible. Keep your facial expressions limited to those that reflect love rather than impatience

Safety first

Recognizing dysphagia can be difficult when the symptoms are subtle. Now that you are aware of the signs, you can feel more confident as you navigate evaluation and treatment of this condition.

*For more information about neurological conditions that can cause dysphagia, visit the **Ceresti Brain Health Education portal** at brainhealth.ceresti.com. If this is your first time visiting the portal, please use the code **GIVECARE** when you register.*



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CERESTI RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

BRAINHQ IS HERE!

Ceresti is now offering you BrainHQ right on your tablet so you can work out your brain. You're used to hearing about the type of exercise that strengthens your heart, your muscles and your abs.

BrainHQ is a personal gym too, but with this, you'll be exercising your memory, attention, thinking speed, people skills, intelligence and way-finding skills.

Changing and strengthening your brain can be hard work—so while the exercises in BrainHQ are fun and addictive, they can also be challenging. Most importantly, they always give your brain a meaningful workout. Using a special algorithm, each exercise adapts in difficulty as you work so that you always train at the optimum level for you—where you are most likely to improve your performance.

Each level in BrainHQ takes less than 5 minutes, so you can do it in small blocks of time or long stretches - whatever works for your schedule. Plus, you can use it on any home computer or mobile device so it travels with you.

BrainHQ can even help you set up reminders to do your training sessions, if you want them.

You can find BrainHQ on your Ceresti tablet. Just tap into your Care Hub and click on PROGRAMS. If you can't find it, contact your coach for help.

Ready to get your brain more fit? Get started today!