

The Empowered Care Partner

Together With You on Your Ceresti-Care Partner Journey



FEATURED ARTICLE

Find a Hobby - Do What Brings You Joy this Summer

Finding a new hobby that you love offers a wonderful opportunity for lifelong learning!

Choose activities that are fun and engaging, so you look forward to doing it as often as you can - even every day, if that's possible. To make the most of your hobby, you'll want to make sure it's **Neurobic**. That means that it helps you make new connections in your brain. More connections mean a bigger brain, and more **cognitive reserve** - and that's what helps you stave off age-related cognitive decline.

To make sure a hobby is *Neurobic*, choose one that's new to you so you can learn from it. Choosing a hobby that involves all of your five senses is a bonus, as that's what helps create new neural connections that light up regions all over your brain!

How do you choose a hobby that's Neurobic?

Begin by thinking about your interests and your personality traits. Are you interested in a group activity or do you prefer to go it solo?

Group activities could include taking a dance class, learning and playing a new card game or joining a book club.

Solo activities could be taking an online class to learn about wines or photography. Did you have a hobby as a child? Perhaps you might pick up watercolor painting or try playing piano again.

You might also think about something you've always wanted to do but never had the time or patience before - and now you do.

Here are some ideas to consider:

- *Learn a new gadget* - Take up photography with a fancy, new camera. Get a telescope, the kind with the long user manual. Build a model airplane with the little ones. Do something that's interesting and fun, but make sure it's new to you.
- *Grow your own garden* - Gardening is an activity that engages all of your senses from running your hands through the earth, smelling the soil and the plants, tasting your herbs and vegetables in salads and side-dishes. Gardening also engages the parts of the brain responsible for executive functions; organization, planning, spatial awareness. There's also the physical component associated with bending and stretching to care for the plants. And of course, you're rewarded with delicious fruits, vegetables or flowers in the end.
- *Take a different kind of vacation* - When it comes to vacations, we all have our own preferences. Some of us prefer to lie on a sunny beach, others prefer to hike up a beautiful mountain while others love to explore historical cities around the world. The good news is that we can always try something new. If you typically go to a tropical island, take your next

FEATURED ARTICLE

Continued from Page 1

vacation in Greece. If you spent your last vacation at the Running of the Bulls at Pamplona, volunteer at an archeological dig the next time.

For some relaxed, quality time together, consider a hobby that you and your loved one can do together. Jewelry-making, learning and playing new card games and bird watching are examples of hobbies you can do together.

Hopefully, some of these ideas will help inspire you to do something new and different and *good for your brain* - **something Neurobic!**

For more information about your brain and how to keep it healthy, visit Ceresti's *Brain Health Education Portal* at brainhealth.ceresti.com. If you are visiting the portal for the first time, use the code **GIVECARE when you register.**

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



The Magic of Using a Caregiver Journal



**By Marilyn Abrahamson, MA, CCC-SLP – CBHC
Ceresti Brain Health Coach and Educator**

Journaling can be a highly effective method for reducing stress - and for digging into feelings and thoughts that lie far beneath the surface. Often, it takes the kind of intense thought we use when we're writing to truly understand and manage some of those deep-seated emotions – the kind of emotions that contribute to burnout and depression in a care partner.

I always tell my care partners, *“you can't see the thoughts that are swirling around in your head – you have to get them down on paper where you can see them, and deal with them appropriately.”* Writing down those thoughts in a dedicated journal is a surprisingly therapeutic way to do that.

Chronic stress can have devastating effects on both physical and mental health, which is why it's important to find ways to cope. As a care partner, the intensity of such feelings as resentment, anger and sadness can increase stress. Getting those thoughts and feelings out of your head and down on paper can help release their intensity, reducing stress and making you feel better. That's where journaling comes in.

Here are four ways you can use your journal to reduce stress associated with being a care partner:

Begin every journal entry with a list of things that make you feel happy and grateful. Stress can cause your mind to skew toward the negative. It becomes your brain's default; it's automatic.

When you feel this way, it's easy to focus on what makes your life as a care partner feel like drudgery. If you feel that your life consists of never ending work, overwhelming responsibility, and that everything you do is thankless, it can be discouraging, to say the least. But sitting down and

filling your pages with positive, wonderful thoughts - the sweet aspects of your life that are there, and waiting in the wings for you to notice, will teach your brain to switch directions, and focus on the good. *And that alone can be life-changing.*

Keep track of all you've accomplished as a care partner.

The work associated with being a care partner can be arduous and, at times, frustrating. But when your efforts have a positive result, it's important to recognize those accomplishments and congratulate yourself by listing them. It can be something as big as successfully fighting an insurance company for reimbursement of a procedure, or as routine as getting your loved one to eat a healthy meal.

List some things you can do that bring you joy. It's always nice to have something to look forward to. So, make a short list of activities you love to do that will fit into your schedule for the next few days. Playing the piano, reading a good book, calling an old friend – these are the types of activities you can look forward to doing the next time you have a few minutes to yourself. Writing them down in your journal will help you make the intention so they are more likely to happen.

Write a note to yourself – in the third person. How many times have you offered good advice to someone who was hurting? But when something is bothering you, that same wisdom you offered to someone else becomes elusive. That's because it's harder to give good advice when there is an emotional component. The good news is, you can reduce the level of emotion associated with the situation by writing about your problem, and offering yourself advice *in the third person*.

Writing in third person separates you from the problem. It allows you to focus more on facts and potential solutions in a way that reduces the emotional intensity that can cloud your perspective. It can help you reach important realizations about your problem and find a solution.

How to get started

All you need is a dedicated notebook and a pen or pencil. You can also create a dedicated document on your computer, if you prefer to type. Some journals have writing prompts, which can be helpful if you're prone to writer's block. Give yourself 10 or 15 minutes a day to write about whatever you want without restriction. And always remember, in order to begin each day with a full cup, you'll need to turn some of that compassion back toward yourself.

RECOGNIZING CHANGE

WHEN YOUR LOVED ONE BECOMES WITHDRAWN

As a *Ceresti care partner*, recognizing change in your loved one's condition or demeanor is an important skill we strive to help you develop and strengthen.

If your loved one begins to socially withdraw, it may happen so gradually you may not notice it at first. Over time, you may begin to see that your once-vibrant loved one now spends hours glued to the television or needs to be convinced to join you on visits with friends and family.

As people age, it's not uncommon for them to stop participating in once-pleasurable hobbies and interests. Even the most independent seniors will need to back off on activities like hiking, long drives in the car and complicated home-maintenance projects. In addition, it's also natural for older people to shrink their activities and responsibilities as a way of gaining control of their life. However, this can have unintended consequences as it can cause your loved one to lose the ability to adapt, opportunities to socialize, skills for activities they no longer perform, and cognitive skills overall. All these can lead to loneliness, depression, deterioration of overall health and reduced quality of life.

Encouraging your loved one to find a sense of purpose can help them regain the desire to be more social, active, and motivated to learn something new and interesting.

Studies show that people with a sense of purpose are happier and content with their lives. Activities with achievable goals that are driven by a sense of meaning and purpose can include:

- Finding and writing to a pen pal
- Tending to a garden
- Caring for a low-maintenance pet
- Knitting a sweater
- Assembling a puzzle
- Volunteering in the community

As a care partner, it's likely that you know your loved one better than most others, but there could be important aspects of their life that you don't know. Find opportunities to draw your loved one out by sitting down for a pointed conversation and then, truly listen to what they have to say. Ask them about their likes and dislikes, and talk to them about their challenges. What frightens them and what gives them comfort?

If they feel uncomfortable leaving the house, would they enjoy it more if people came to visit them in their own home? Most importantly, what would they most like to be doing with their time?

Conversations like this may reveal opportunities for socialization and engagement that you may not have known existed. For example, your loved one may enjoy talking with others who have had similar life-experiences, professions, hobbies or challenges. The more you know, the more equipped you will be in helping your loved one find activities that will draw them out.

Showing your loved one that you love and care for them will go a long way in helping them to feel supported, which can draw them out. Tell stories from the past, play music and watch movies together that inspire happy memories. Focus on spending quality time together, and remind them that they are not alone.

If your loved one is withdrawn, watch for underlying health problems. When social isolation, depression and anxiety take hold, other health challenges are likely to follow. Ensure that they are eating well, drinking enough water, sleeping, getting some exercise, and staying on top of their medications. Also, observe to ensure they are not smoking or drinking alcohol to excess.

Depending on what your loved one is experiencing, you may wish to consult with your loved one's doctor for guidance. No matter what, pay attention, offer your support, and be there to help your loved one make healthy choices. Above all, if you believe your loved one has depression or anxiety, make sure they get the professional treatment they need to learn to manage their symptoms and minimize isolation in the future.

If you believe your loved one needs immediate help, especially if they are thinking about self-harm, call your loved one's doctor or go to a hospital emergency room, or call the 24-hour Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988. In non-emergency situations, your Ceresti coach is also available for support by sending a message on your tablet.