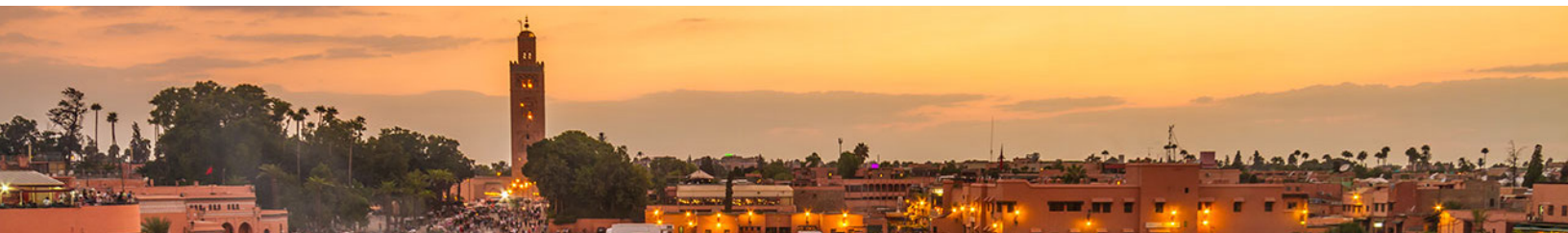


November 2023

The Empowered Care Partner



Together With You on Your Ceresti-Care Partner Journey



FEATURED ARTICLE

November is Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month

Dementia is defined as a general term for impairment of memory, thinking, decision-making, and inability to perform daily activities. Alzheimer's Disease is the most common form of dementia.

In 1983, less than two million people had been living with Alzheimer's disease when Ronald Reagan designated the month of November as Alzheimer's Disease awareness month. In 2023, close to five million people are living with the condition, and those numbers are only expected to climb.

Currently, there is no cure for Alzheimer's, but there are treatments that studies show can slow down progression of the condition, and research continues.

Risk factors that can increase your risk for developing a memory disorder like Alzheimer's Disease or another type of dementia have been identified by scientists. While some of these risk factors cannot be changed – age, family

history, and environment, evidence suggests that others can be influenced.

Which risk factors for Alzheimer's can be controlled?

Risk factors that can be influenced by healthy lifestyle choices and habits are called *modifiable risk factors*.

The following are the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations for taking charge of your brain health (and health overall):

- **Prevent and manage high blood pressure.** Tens of millions of American adults have high blood pressure, and many do not have it under control.
- **Manage blood sugar.** Learn how to manage your blood sugar if you have diabetes.

FEATURED ARTICLE

Continued from Page 1

- Maintain a healthy weight. Healthy eating and regular physical activity can help you maintain a healthy weight.
- Be physically active. Physical activity can improve thinking, reduce risk of depression and anxiety, and help you sleep better.
- Quit smoking. Quitting smoking now may help maintain brain health and can reduce your risk of heart disease, cancer, lung disease, and other smoking-related illnesses. Free Quitline: 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669)
- Avoid excessive drinking. If you drink, do so in moderation.
- Prevent and correct hearing loss. Make sure to talk to a hearing care professional to treat and manage hearing loss.
- Get enough sleep. A third of American adults report that they usually get less sleep than the recommended amount. How much sleep do you need? It depends on your age.

Set yourself up for success.

To increase your chances for success and to avoid overwhelm associated with too much change, incorporate these adjustments into your life gradually, rather than all at once. For example, getting to bed 30 minutes earlier at night, or simply taking a walk each day is a great way to start implementing these healthy habits and lifestyle choices.

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



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**.

STAY CURIOUS AND KEEP LEARNING



By Marilyn Abrahamson, Brain Health Education Specialist at Ceresti

This November, as we spread awareness and education about Alzheimer's Disease, it's important to explore the ways you can help delay, and even prevent development of Alzheimer's symptoms in the future.

One of the best ways to do that is to light up your brain with challenging and enjoyable activities whenever you can.

As a practicing speech-language pathologist, understanding the brain has been a key part of my job, and I saw many patients over the decades. I clearly remember one, in particular - Sheila, a 68-year-old retired legal secretary who had recently started a business selling beautiful hand-painted glass water pitchers.

Initially, she took some business courses, particularly to learn how to use technology, a necessary skill when running a home-based business. Her study habits, previously successful, seemed to become less and less effective over time.

When Sheila felt that something wasn't right, she saw her doctor and was ultimately diagnosed with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI). MCI is a type of cognitive decline that is not generally severe enough to affect a person's independence on its own, but is more significant than that of normal brain-aging. It typically affects memory, language, thinking and judgment. People with MCI have a higher risk for developing dementia, although not all cases progress to Alzheimer's Disease or other types of dementia.

Despite her adversity, Sheila greeted me for each session with a smile and a joke. When I asked about her goals, she told me she wanted to finish her business classes, despite her diagnosis. She accepted that she may or may not ever have a booming business selling her hand-painted pitchers, but she wanted to finish what she started. "Most of all," she told me, "I just want to keep learning."

Sheila understood the benefit of cognitive reserve.

Cognitive reserve is the brain's suit of armor – and gives it the ability to be resilient in response to age, illness or injury. It comes from having endless curiosity about life, persistently challenging the brain, and engaging in lifelong learning endeavors.

Cognitive reserve is like training for a 10k when you're only planning to run a 5k – so when you're finished training, you'll have plenty of reserve to spare.

To help, Sheila also learned how to use memory strategies that engaged all of her senses, creating meaningful associations and visualizations. She learned how to switch-on her attention with purpose when it didn't happen automatically, and she learned about the importance of being mindful.

After six months of cognitive therapy and another year of school, Sheila finally finished her coursework and was ready to launch her business. She ran it modestly but successfully for a full two years before retiring with her husband, loving every minute of this work she had longed to do for years, while keeping her mind alive with new learning every day.

As of this issue, Sheila is 75 years old and still painting her beautiful glass water pitchers, giving them as gifts for friends and family. Although her cognitive decline has advanced a bit since we worked together in 2016, she is still independent and experiencing the joy of knowing she can still do what she loves every day.

Sheila once told me that she believed "it's never too late to learn more about the world" and she was right!

The cognitive reserve that Sheila ultimately developed was a product of her intense curiosity about the world and her love of lifelong learning. This knowledge, along with her vision and drive are what continue to give her a wonderful gift each day... *the gift of time.*

Sensory Changes in Older People

Some age-related changes are more common than others.

Changes to the five senses - *vision, hearing, smell, touch, and taste* are among those common changes, making it easier for you to recognize as a care partner. If you do notice changes to any of the five senses, it's important to acknowledge and address them as they can greatly affect your loved one's quality of life, making it harder to do everyday tasks and enjoy socializing with others.

Let's discuss the various sensory changes that occur with age and what you can do to address them.

Vision

Vision changes are likely the most common sensory changes experienced as people get older. This happens because, as your loved one gets older, the lenses in their eyes become less flexible, which can make it more difficult to focus on close objects. This condition is known as presbyopia and affects nearly everyone over the age of 40. In addition to presbyopia, older adults may also experience a loss of contrast sensitivity, making it more difficult to see in low-light conditions. Cataracts, glaucoma, and macular degeneration are also common eye conditions that can affect vision in the elderly.

Hearing

Along with vision changes, hearing loss is another common sensory change in older people. Presbycusis, or age-related hearing loss, affects nearly one-third of adults over the age of 65. This condition typically affects the ability to hear higher-pitched sounds and causes difficulty understanding speech in noisy environments. Other causes of hearing loss in older people include exposure to loud noises over time and certain medications.

Taste and Smell

Changes to the ability to taste and smell are also common as people get older. As a person ages, it's common for the number of taste buds on the tongue to decrease, making it more difficult to taste certain flavors. Changes in smell can also

impact taste, as the sense of smell is closely linked to the ability to taste. This can make it more difficult to enjoy food and may reduce the enjoyment of eating and contribute to loss of appetite.

Touch

Changes in touch sensation are less commonly discussed than changes in vision or hearing, but they can also be significant. As your loved one ages, skin becomes thinner and less elastic, which can make it more difficult to feel pressure and temperature changes. This can make it more difficult to feel pain from an injury (such as a cut or burn), or to detect other health problems, such as infections or circulation issues.

What to do if you suspect sensory loss in your loved one

Sensory changes are a natural part of aging, and there are strategies that can help manage these changes and improve quality of life. For example:

- Vision changes can be managed with corrective lenses or surgery for cataracts, glaucoma, or macular degeneration.
- Hearing aids can help manage age-related hearing loss.
- Making dietary changes or using spices and seasonings can help improve food taste for those experiencing taste and smell changes.
- Using caution when performing tasks that require tactile (touch) sensation can help prevent injuries.

In addition to these strategies, it's also important for older individuals to have regular check-ups with their healthcare providers to monitor sensory changes and identify any potential concerns. If your loved one is experiencing sensory changes, it's important to seek the advice of a healthcare professional to ensure proper diagnosis and treatment.