

May 2024

# The Empowered Care Partner



## Together With You on Your Ceresti-Care Partner Journey



### FEATURED ARTICLE

## Stroke Awareness Month: A Guide for Family Caregivers

May is *Stroke Awareness Month*, a time dedicated to spreading knowledge about strokes and empowering families with information to support their loved ones. As a *Ceresti family caregiver*, we want to empower you with the confidence and skills needed to accurately identify the signs, risk factors, and preventive measures associated with strokes.

### What is a Stroke?

A stroke happens when there is a disruption in blood flow to the brain, either due to a blockage (ischemic stroke) or bleeding (hemorrhagic stroke). When the brain doesn't get enough blood and oxygen, cells can be damaged or die, affecting various bodily functions.

### Know the Signs

*Recognizing the signs of a stroke is crucial for swift action. Remember the acronym **FAST**:*

- **Face:** Is there drooping on one side? Ask the person to smile.
- **Arms:** Can they raise both arms? Is one arm weak or numb?
- **Speech:** Is their speech slurred? Ask them to repeat a simple phrase.
- **Time:** If you observe any of these signs, it's time to call emergency services immediately.

### Risk Factors

Understanding the risk factors for strokes can help caregivers take preventive measures. Some risk factors are beyond our control, such as age, family history, and ethnicity. However, lifestyle choices play a significant role.

*Encourage your loved one to:*

- Maintain a healthy diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Engage in regular physical activity.
- Monitor and manage conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, and cholesterol.

### Prevention is Key

Taking steps to prevent strokes is vital for maintaining overall well-being. Encourage your loved one to attend regular check-ups, take all prescribed medications, and make heart and brain-healthy lifestyle changes if necessary. Emphasize the importance of managing stress and getting adequate sleep.

### Supporting Stroke Survivors

If your loved one has experienced a stroke, being a supportive caregiver is crucial to their recovery. Listen to their concerns, and celebrate small victories. Help them attend medical appointments and stick to their rehabilitation therapy routines.

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### **Adapting the Home Environment**

After a stroke, your loved one's home may need modifications to ensure they live in a safe and supportive environment. Consider installing handrails, removing tripping hazards, and arranging furniture for easy navigation around the house. Assistive devices, such as grab bars and shower chairs, can enhance independence as well.

### **Seek Caregiver Support**

Being a family caregiver can be challenging, and it's okay to ask for help. If you're caring for a loved one who has had a stroke, connect with local support groups or online communities to share experiences and gather advice.

**Stroke Awareness Month** serves as a reminder of the importance of education and preparedness. By understanding the signs, risk factors, and preventive measures, you can play a crucial role in the well-being of your loved one, where they can receive the support and care they need for a fulfilling life.

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

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To learn more about stroke prevention and other brain health issues, visit **Ceresti's Brain Health Education Portal** at [brainhealth.ceresti.com](http://brainhealth.ceresti.com). If you're visiting the portal for the first time, use the code **GIVECARE** when you register.

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## TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR RISK FACTORS

### NAVIGATING YOUR HEALTH, WELLBEING AND STRESS

As a family caregiver, it's essential to pay attention to your own well-being while caring for your loved one, particularly when it comes to *caregiver stress*. Let's explore the best ways to do that.

#### **Understand Your Health Risk Factors**

Health risk factors are things that can affect your health. These can include what you eat, how much you exercise, and even the amount of stress in your life. Let's talk about stress, especially the kind that comes with being a caregiver.

#### **The Stress of Caregiving**

Taking care of a family member can be rewarding, but it can also be stressful. The stress of caregiving can affect your health. It's like carrying a heavy backpack – if it's too heavy for too long, it can cause problems.

**Physical Health:** Stress can make you feel tired, affect your sleep, and even lead to headaches or stomachaches.

**Emotional Well-being:** Caregiving stress can also make you feel sad or worried. It's okay to feel this way, but it's essential to find ways to cope.

#### **Taking Charge**

*Here are some simple steps you can take to manage stress and other health risk factors:*

**Take Breaks:** It's okay to take a break. Ask for help from friends or family members to give yourself some time to relax and recharge.

**Healthy Eating:** Try to eat a balanced diet with lots of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. These foods can give you the energy you need.

**Exercise:** Even a short walk can make a big difference. Find activities you enjoy to keep your body moving.

**Talk to Someone:** Share your feelings with a friend, family member, or a support group. Sometimes, just talking about it can make you feel better.

**Ask for Help:** Don't be afraid to ask for help. Whether it's with caregiving tasks or emotional support, reaching out is a sign of strength.

Remember, by taking care of yourself, you're better able to take care of your loved ones.

As a family caregiver, it's crucial to be aware of the health risk factors associated with caregiving stress. By taking charge of your well-being, you not only benefit yourself but also enhance the care you provide to your loved one. Small steps can lead to big changes, and you deserve to lead a healthy and fulfilling life.

## BITE-SIZED TIPS FOR A BETTER BRAIN

### TAKE A BRAIN BOOSTING NATURE WALK

The warmer weather brings the sunshine along with new possibilities for enriching the lives of both you and your loved ones - *while also providing a boost to brain health*. Let's explore some simple yet impactful ways to spend a warm, beautiful day, now that spring is here.

#### **Outdoor Strolls**

Spring invites us to step outside and enjoy the fresh air. Taking your loved one for a gentle stroll in the garden or a nearby park can be both invigorating and therapeutic. Did you know that spending time in nature has been linked to improved cognitive function and reduced stress levels? The warmth of the sun not only lifts spirits but also provides a natural source of Vitamin D, essential for overall brain health.

#### **Gardening Together**

Engaging in light gardening activities can be a wonderful way to connect with your loved one and with nature. Whether it's planting colorful flowers in pots or tending to a small vegetable patch, gardening fosters a sense of accomplishment and joy. The act of gardening has been shown to stimulate the brain, promoting mental well-being and cognitive function.

#### **Picnics and Outdoor Meals**

Pack a simple picnic and head to a nearby park for a change of scenery. Enjoying a meal outdoors can be a refreshing break from routine. Choose foods that transport easily and appeal to your loved one. Don't forget to bring a comfortable blanket, allowing you both to relax as you both appreciate the beauty of nature while enjoying the meal together. Such moments of relaxation contribute to reduced stress, benefiting both your mental and emotional well-being.

#### **Creative Outdoor Activities**

Explore creative activities that align with the season. Consider bringing along art supplies for an outdoor painting or sketching session or engaging in gentle exercises like tai chi. Tailor these activities to suit the abilities and interests of your loved one, creating moments of joy and connection. The creative stimulation not only brings joy but also supports cognitive function, contributing to a healthier brain.

#### **Cherished Memories Through Photography**

Capture the beauty of late spring through the lens of a camera. Encourage your loved one to take photos of blooming flowers, colorful birds, or any sights that capture their attention. Not only does this provide a creative outlet, but it also creates a visual diary of shared experiences, fostering a sense of connection and nostalgia. Engaging in photography exercises the mind, enhancing memory and cognitive skills.

Late spring activities open up a world of possibilities for caregivers and their loved ones. From outdoor strolls to creative activities, there are numerous ways to make the most of this vibrant season, all while benefiting brain health. Embrace the warmth, and create cherished memories that can be enjoyed, especially at this beautiful time of the year.

# A Family Caregiver's Toolbox for May

May is the perfect time to create precious moments with your loved ones. Let's explore a toolbox of activities designed to be both stimulating and enjoyable for your loved ones.

### ***Create Crafts with Flowers***

May is synonymous with flowers. Engage your loved ones in a simple yet fun crafting activity. Collect colorful paper, glue, and some twigs. Create beautiful paper flowers together, fostering creativity and fine motor skills. These vibrant blooms can brighten up any room and serve as a lasting reminder of your shared moments.

### ***Stroll Down Memory Lane with a Photo Collage***

Take a trip down memory lane by sorting through old photo albums. Select pictures that evoke happy memories and create a collage together. This activity not only stimulates the brain as you recall past events but also provides an opportunity to share stories and laughter.

### ***Take Nature Strolls and Watch for Birds***

Enjoy the May weather with a gentle stroll in a nearby park for some bird watching. Bring a bird guidebook or use a bird identification app to discover and learn about the different species. This outdoor activity provides both physical exercise and a refreshing change of scenery.

### ***Enjoy Creating New Dishes***

Cooking together is a fantastic way to stimulate the senses. Choose a simple recipe and involve your loved one in the kitchen. Whether it's baking cookies, making sandwiches, or preparing a fruit salad, the joy of creating something delicious is bound to bring smiles to both your faces.

### ***Music Can Be Magical***

Music has the power to uplift spirits and evoke emotions. Create a playlist of your loved one's favorite tunes and have a jam session together. Sing along, dance, or simply enjoy the melodies. Music not only entertains but also has therapeutic benefits, enhancing mood and cognitive function.

### ***Enjoy a Puzzle Challenge***

Challenge the brain with puzzles and games. Choose age-appropriate puzzles, crossword puzzles, or simple board games. These activities enhance cognitive abilities and provide a sense of accomplishment. Make it a friendly competition or work together as a team.

### ***Go for Some Garden Therapy***

Planting flowers, herbs, or vegetables is not only a rewarding hobby but also a therapeutic one. The tactile experience of soil, the smell of fresh plants, and the satisfaction of nurturing something can be incredibly fulfilling.

Incorporating these activities into your routine will not only bring joy to your loved ones but also create lasting memories. Remember, the key is to keep it simple, enjoyable, and tailored to your loved one's preferences. May your month of May be filled with laughter, love, and meaningful moments!