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The Empowered Caregiver

Together With You on Your Ceresti-Care Partner Journey



FEATURED ARTICLE

The Power of Self-Compassion for Caregivers: A New Year's Resolution

As we welcome the new year, many of us reflect on ways to improve our lives. For caregivers, though, self-care often takes a back seat to the needs of those we care for. This January, consider making a simple yet powerful resolution: practicing self-compassion.

Caregiving can be physically and emotionally draining. From managing doctor appointments to handling day-to-day tasks, you're constantly focused on someone else's needs. It's easy to forget about your own well-being, which can lead to stress, burnout, and even feelings of guilt when you're unable to do everything perfectly.

That's where self-compassion comes in. Unlike self-care, which often involves finding time for specific activities like exercise or relaxation, self-compassion is about how you treat yourself in your thoughts. It's giving yourself the same kindness and understanding you'd offer a friend.

Why Self-Compassion Matters

Studies show that self-compassion can improve both mental and physical health. For caregivers, this can mean feeling more resilient in the face

of challenges. Instead of criticizing yourself for feeling tired or overwhelmed, you acknowledge those feelings and remind yourself that it's okay to struggle. Caregiving is hard, and you're doing your best.

Kristin Neff, a researcher who studies self-compassion, explains that there are three key elements: self-kindness, mindfulness, and common humanity. Self-kindness involves being gentle with yourself when things go wrong. Mindfulness is recognizing your feelings without being overwhelmed by them. And common humanity reminds you that you are not alone—many others are going through similar challenges.

Practical Ways to Practice Self-Compassion

- 1. Talk to Yourself Like a Friend:** When you're having a tough day, notice how you talk to yourself. If your inner voice is harsh or critical, try to shift it to a more supportive tone. Think about what you'd say to a close friend in your situation, and tell yourself the same thing.

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2. **Take Mindful Breaks:** Throughout your day, take a few moments to check in with how you're feeling. If you notice stress or frustration building up, acknowledge those feelings without judgment. Even a brief pause can help you reset and feel more grounded.
3. **Acknowledge Your Efforts:** Caregiving is hard work. Remind yourself of the countless tasks you manage each day and recognize the effort you're putting in. Celebrate small victories, whether it's getting through a tough day or finding a moment to rest.
4. **Reach Out for Support:** You don't have to go through this journey alone. Sharing your experiences with other caregivers can remind you

that your challenges are part of the shared human experience. Support groups, whether in-person or online, can offer a space to connect and be heard.

A Compassionate Start to the Year

As 2025 begins, make a promise to treat yourself with the kindness you deserve. At Ceresti, our goal is to help you feel supported in this goal.

Caregiving will always come with its ups and downs, but by practicing self-compassion, you can nurture your own well-being while continuing to provide the best care possible. This simple shift in mindset can make a world of difference, not just for you, but for those you care for as well.

By Marilyn Abrahamson, Brain Health Education Specialist at Ceresti Health

BITE-SIZED TIPS FOR A BETTER BRAIN

WINTER BRAIN BOOST

As winter sets in, it's easy to feel sluggish, but keeping your brain active is key to staying sharp. Here are a few quick tips to give your brain a boost this season:

1. **Move Daily** – Even a short walk outside or some gentle stretching can help your brain by increasing blood flow and reducing stress.
2. **Stay Social** – Chat with a friend or join a virtual group. Social interactions keep your brain engaged and support emotional health.
3. **Eat Brain-Boosting Foods** – Include winter-friendly foods like leafy greens, nuts, and fish in your diet. They're rich in nutrients that help brain function.
4. **Try Something New** – Learn a new hobby or skill to challenge your mind and build new connections.

Keep these small steps in mind to brighten your brain this winter!

To learn more about how to boost brain health, visit the *Ceresti Health Brain Health Education* portal at brainhealth.ceresti.com. Use the code GIVECARE to register.

When Your Loved One Seems “Different”

As a caregiver, your days are busy. You’re taking care of your loved one, yourself, your family, and more. With so much going on, it’s easy to miss small changes in your loved one’s condition.

At Ceresti, we’re here to help you keep your loved one healthy and happy. We do this by giving you the support and information you need to handle the challenges you face. That’s why we’re starting a new monthly series in *The Empowered Care Partner* newsletter called *Recognizing Change*.

This series is important because noticing and reporting changes in your loved one’s condition can help prevent bigger medical problems later on. If you see changes in their physical abilities, behavior, thinking, activity level, or personality—even small ones—it’s important to tell their doctor right away. Waiting too long can make things worse.

What changes should you look for?

Here are some examples of changes you might notice (this is not a complete list):

- **Behavioral changes:** Your loved one may act out in ways that aren't normal for them, like crying for no clear reason, becoming angry, refusing to take care of themselves, or being combative. On the other hand, if they are usually active, they might seem more tired, quiet, or withdrawn.
- **Physical changes:** You might notice that your loved one isn’t moving as well as they usually do. Maybe they’re falling more often or having trouble with things like holding a fork, even though they could do it before.
- **Cognitive changes:** If your loved one seems more confused or forgetful, that could be a sign. They might have trouble doing things they used to, like using the TV remote, counting money, or sorting laundry. They could also struggle to tell you what they need or take longer to understand what you’re saying.

Being able to recognize these changes is essential. In the coming months, we’ll go deeper into this topic so you can learn how to improve this skill. Stay tuned!



SELF CARE FOR THE CAREGIVER

THE HIDDEN STRUGGLES OF PERFECTIONISM IN CAREGIVING

Caregiving is a challenging and rewarding role, but for those who strive for perfection, it can feel overwhelming. While it's natural to want the best for your loved one, setting unrealistic standards for yourself can lead to frustration, burnout, and even harm the quality of care you provide.

One common issue with perfectionism in caregiving is the belief that you have to do everything on your own. You may feel guilty about asking for help, fearing that others won't meet your standards. However, this can cause emotional and physical exhaustion, which ultimately affects your ability to provide care. Accepting that you can't do everything perfectly—and that asking for support is not a failure—is key to maintaining your well-being.

Another challenge is being overly critical of yourself. You might worry that every mistake could have a serious impact. But caregiving is a journey filled with trial and error. Rather than focusing on what you didn't do perfectly, try to acknowledge the many things you are doing well. Embracing your imperfections can make caregiving more manageable and less stressful.

Finally, perfectionism can prevent you from taking time for yourself. It's important to remember that self-care isn't selfish. By taking care of your own needs, you will be in a better position to care for others. Whether it's setting aside time to relax or reaching out to a support group, giving yourself permission to rest is essential.

Caregiving is about doing your best, not being perfect. Letting go of perfectionism can lead to better health and a more positive caregiving experience for both you and your loved one.

FAST FACTS FOR CAREGIVERS

After the Heimlich Maneuver

If you've performed the Heimlich Maneuver on your loved one, getting them to the emergency room—even if they seem fine—is crucial.

When an airway obstruction is removed, unseen internal injuries, like rib fractures or damage to the airway, can still occur. Breathing problems may develop later due to trauma or incomplete clearance of the obstruction.

A medical evaluation ensures any hidden injuries are addressed promptly, preventing complications. When in doubt, it's always better to have a healthcare professional assess the situation for peace of mind and safety.