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The Empowered Caregiver



Together With You on Your Ceresti-Care Partner Journey



FEATURED ARTICLE

Navigating Parkinson's: Support for Caregivers

April is Parkinson's Awareness Month, a time to recognize the challenges faced by those living with Parkinson's disease and you, the caregivers who support them. Parkinson's is a *progressive neurological disorder* that affects movement, balance, and coordination. As the disease advances, caregivers play an increasingly important role in managing daily routines and ensuring the well-being of their loved ones.

Understanding the Symptoms

Parkinson's symptoms vary, but the most common include tremors, muscle stiffness, slow movement, and balance difficulties. Many individuals also experience non-motor symptoms such as fatigue, sleep disturbances, depression, and cognitive changes. Recognizing these symptoms early can help caregivers provide better support and seek appropriate medical interventions.

Building a Strong Caregiving Foundation

Caring for someone with Parkinson's requires patience, knowledge, and adaptability. Here are some key strategies to help caregivers navigate this journey:

- 1. Stay Educated** – Learn as much as possible about Parkinson's disease. Understanding its progression and treatment options can help you anticipate challenges and make informed decisions.
- 2. Encourage Physical Activity** – Regular exercise, such as walking, stretching, or specialized movement programs, can help manage symptoms and improve mobility.
- 3. Maintain a Routine** – Structured daily activities can help reduce stress and promote independence for your loved one.
- 4. Monitor Medications** – Parkinson's medications must be taken on schedule to be effective. Work with healthcare providers to ensure proper management.
- 5. Support Emotional Well-being** – Depression and anxiety are common in people with Parkinson's. Encourage social engagement, hobbies, and relaxation techniques to enhance emotional health.

Taking Care of Yourself

Caregiving can be both rewarding and exhausting. To provide the best care, it's essential to take care of yourself, too. Seek respite when

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needed, connect with support groups, and don't hesitate to ask for help. Maintaining your own health and well-being will allow you to be a more effective and compassionate caregiver.

Resources and Support

Many organizations offer valuable resources for Parkinson's caregivers, including the *Parkinson's Foundation* and the *Michael J. Fox Foundation*. Support groups, educational webinars, and professional guidance can make a significant difference in managing caregiving responsibilities.

How Ceresti Supports Caregivers

At *Ceresti*, we are committed to supporting family caregivers, including those caring for loved ones with Parkinson's disease. Our program provides education about Parkinson's and related topics through a dedicated tablet and a caregiver coach who offers personalized support. If you are interested in learning more about Parkinson's disease, visit **Ceresti's Brain Health Education Portal** at brainhealth.ceresti.com. The first time you visit, you can register using the code **GIVECARE**.

As we observe Parkinson's Awareness Month, let's take a moment to acknowledge the dedication of caregivers. Your role is vital in enhancing the quality of life for those living with Parkinson's. Remember, *you are not alone—support is available*, and your efforts truly make a difference.

Written by Marilyn Abrahamson, Brain Health Education Specialist at Ceresti Health

BITE-SIZED TIPS FOR A BETTER BRAIN

MUSIC FOR MENTAL ENERGY

Feeling foggy and sluggish? Music might be just the boost you need! Research shows that the right tunes can enhance focus, improve mood, and even increase mental stamina. Whether you're a caregiver juggling multiple responsibilities or simply looking for a way to stay sharp, music can be a powerful tool for your brain.

Upbeat music with a steady rhythm can help maintain alertness and motivation. Songs with about 120 beats per minute—like pop, classical, or instrumental movie soundtracks—can stimulate brain activity and keep you engaged. If you need to concentrate, try instrumental music or nature sounds to avoid distractions from lyrics.

Music also has the power to lift your mood. Familiar, feel-good songs trigger the release of dopamine, a brain chemical linked to motivation and pleasure. Singing along can enhance these benefits by activating memory and language centers in the brain.

For caregivers, playing music while performing routine tasks can reduce stress and make daily activities more enjoyable. If your loved one enjoys music, sharing a favorite song together can create meaningful connections and boost their mental well-being, too.

Next time you feel drained, put on some music that energizes you. Your brain—and your mood—will thank you!

For more brain-healthy tips, explore **Ceresti's Brain Health Education Portal** at brainhealth.ceresti.com. Use the code **GIVECARE** to register.

How to Spot Early Signs of Infection

Infections can develop quickly in older adults and may not always present with typical symptoms like fever. As a caregiver, recognizing early warning signs can help prevent serious complications.

Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)

UTIs are common in older adults and can cause more than just discomfort. Be on the lookout for:

- Increased confusion or agitation
- Strong-smelling or cloudy urine
- Frequent or painful urination
- Fever or chills (though sometimes absent)

Pneumonia

Pneumonia can develop without the usual signs of coughing and chest pain. Watch for:

- Sudden fatigue or weakness
- Shortness of breath or rapid breathing
- Cough with mucus (or a dry cough in some cases)
- Changes in mental status, such as confusion

Skin Infections

Older adults have thinner skin, making them more prone to infections. Early signs include:

- Redness, warmth, or swelling around a wound or sore
- Pain or tenderness in the affected area
- Drainage or pus
- Fever (though it may not always be present)

If you notice any of these signs, seek medical attention promptly. Early detection can prevent complications and support faster recovery.

As a Ceresti caregiver, you can reach out to your Ceresti coach with any questions or concerns, but be sure to prioritize contacting your loved one's physician if symptoms suggest an active infection.

Always trust your instincts—if something seems off, it's worth a closer look!



RECOGNIZING CHANGE

SUDDEN PERSONALITY SHIFTS: WHEN MOOD OR BEHAVIOR CHANGES UNEXPECTEDLY

As a caregiver, you may notice shifts in your loved one's mood or behavior that seem out of character. A once easygoing person may become irritable or withdrawn, or someone who was typically quiet might suddenly act impulsively or aggressively. These changes can be concerning, but they often have an underlying cause.

Sudden personality shifts can be linked to medical issues, such as infections, medication side effects, or changes in brain function due to dementia, stroke, or other neurological conditions. Emotional stress, pain, or even dehydration can also contribute to unexpected behavioral changes.

If you notice a sudden shift, take note of when it started, any recent changes in health, medications, or environment, and any other unusual symptoms. Keeping a record can help doctors determine the cause. In some cases, a simple fix—like adjusting medication or treating an infection—can restore their usual demeanor.

As a Ceresti caregiver, you have access to a dedicated Ceresti coach. Reach out to your coach if you have concerns about changes in your loved one's behavior. They can often provide guidance and help you determine next steps.

Approach these changes with patience and compassion. Avoid arguing or correcting them, and instead, focus on providing reassurance. If the behavior is extreme, persistent, or dangerous, seek medical advice promptly.

Recognizing and addressing sudden personality shifts early can help ensure your loved one receives the care they need while giving you peace of mind as their caregiver.

SELF CARE FOR THE CAREGIVER

Taking Time for Yourself: How to Prioritize Self-Care Without Guilt

As a caregiver, it's easy to put your own needs last while caring for others. However, neglecting self-care can lead to burnout, stress, and even physical health issues. Prioritizing your own well-being isn't selfish—it's essential.

It can be helpful to set boundaries, both mentally and physically. Let others know that it's okay to lean on them when needed, and consider joining support groups or hiring respite care for regular breaks.

Creative Ways to Integrate Self-Care:

- Take a 5-minute "mindful pause" to breathe deeply, clear your mind, and reset.
- Try a 10-minute morning stretching routine to loosen up and start the day fresh.
- Listen to an inspiring podcast or audiobook during a walk or while doing chores.
- Dance to your favorite song or enjoy a mini-dance break for a mood boost.
- Set a "no-tech" time in the evening to relax without screens, focusing on hobbies or a calming ritual.
- Try journaling for a few minutes each day to express your thoughts and feelings.
- Enjoy a hot cup of tea or coffee in a quiet spot, savoring the moment without distractions.
- Take a power nap (10-20 minutes) to refresh and recharge during the day.
- Treat yourself to a DIY spa day with a relaxing bath, skincare routine, or face mask.
- Practice gratitude by writing down three things you're thankful for each day.

Be kind to yourself—acknowledge that you're doing your best. By filling your own cup, you'll be better equipped to support your loved one with energy and compassion.

Self-care isn't a luxury; it's a necessity for both you and your loved one. Take the time you need, guilt-free, to maintain your own health and happiness.