

May 2025

# The Empowered Caregiver



## Together With You on Your Ceresti Caregiver Journey



### FEATURED ARTICLE

## Recognizing and Responding to Stroke: A Guide for Caregivers

May is *Stroke Awareness Month*, a time dedicated to increasing awareness about stroke prevention, recognition, and recovery. As a Ceresti caregiver, understanding stroke and knowing how to respond can make a life-changing difference for your loved one.

### Understanding Stroke

A stroke occurs when blood flow to the brain is blocked (ischemic stroke) or when a blood vessel bursts (hemorrhagic stroke). Without oxygen-rich blood, brain cells begin to die within minutes. Stroke is a leading cause of long-term disability and the fifth leading cause of death in the U.S., making early recognition critical.

### Recognizing the Signs

The faster a stroke is treated, the better the chances of recovery. Use the acronym **BE FAST** to identify warning signs:

- **Balance:** Sudden loss of balance or coordination
- **Eyes:** Blurred or double vision
- **Face:** One side of the face droops when smiling
- **Arms:** Weakness or numbness in one arm
- **Speech:** Slurred speech or difficulty speaking
- **Time:** Call 911 immediately if you notice any of these symptoms

*Time is of the essence*—prompt medical intervention can reduce brain damage and improve recovery outcomes.

### Supporting a Loved One Post-Stroke

Caring for a loved one who has had a stroke involves patience, understanding, and adapting to their changing needs. Many stroke survivors experience challenges such as mobility issues, speech difficulties, memory problems, and emotional changes. Here's how you can help:

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### 1. Encourage Rehabilitation

Physical, occupational, speech, swallowing, and cognitive therapy can be crucial in stroke recovery. Help your loved one stay engaged in their rehabilitation plan, whether by practicing exercises at home with them or accompanying them to therapy sessions.

### 2. Optimize Home Safety

To promote safety and independence, consider making home modifications such as installing grab bars, removing tripping hazards such as throw rugs, and arranging furniture for easy navigation.

### 3. Support Emotional Well-Being

Stroke can lead to depression and anxiety. Encourage social interaction, provide reassurance, and seek professional support if needed. As a caregiver, you must also prioritize your own mental health—join a support group or seek respite care when necessary.

### 4. Prevent Future Strokes

Help your loved one adopt a heart-healthy lifestyle by promoting nutritious meals, regular physical activity, and medication adherence. Managing conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol can reduce the risk of recurrent strokes.

### Care for the Caregiver

Providing care for a stroke survivor can be demanding. Don't hesitate to ask for help from family, friends, or professional caregivers. Taking care of your own physical and mental well-being allows you to provide better support for your loved one.

By recognizing stroke symptoms, acting quickly, and offering compassionate care, you can play a vital role in your loved one's recovery and quality of life. Let *Stroke Awareness Month* be a reminder to stay informed, prepared, and proactive in stroke prevention and care.

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

## BITE-SIZED TIPS FOR A BETTER BRAIN

### BRAIN BOOSTERS IN 5 MINUTES OR LESS

Caring for a loved one with dementia or a neurological condition can be challenging, but it's important to take a few minutes for yourself each day to keep your brain sharp. Here are some simple, quick exercises you can do in under 5 minutes:

1. **Word Puzzles:** Try a crossword or word search. These puzzles help improve your vocabulary and keep your mind active.
2. **Memory Games:** Play a quick matching game, either with cards or an app. You can also try recalling a list of words or objects and then see how many you can remember.
3. **Number Games:** Do some simple math in your head, like adding or subtracting numbers, or try to multiply numbers in your mind without using a calculator.
4. **Visualization Exercise:** Close your eyes and picture a favorite place, focusing on all the details. This helps improve focus and mental clarity.

Taking just a few minutes for these exercises can have a big impact on maintaining cognitive health and reducing stress. Make them a part of your daily routine!

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To learn more about stroke and other brain-health-related topics, visit **Ceresti's Brain Health Education Portal** at [brainhealth.ceresti.com](https://brainhealth.ceresti.com). The first time you visit, register using the code **GIVECARE**.

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# Stroke Awareness and Prevention

May is Stroke Awareness Month, making it the perfect time to focus on how caregivers can help reduce the risk of stroke for themselves and their loved ones. Strokes can lead to serious long-term effects on brain health, including memory loss, difficulty speaking, and even paralysis. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to lower the risk and protect brain function.

A stroke happens when blood flow to a part of the brain is stopped, either due to a blockage (ischemic stroke) or a ruptured blood vessel (hemorrhagic stroke). Both types can harm the brain and impact thinking and memory, which is why caregivers must be aware of and manage the risk factors.

### Managing High Blood Pressure

One of the leading causes of stroke is high blood pressure (hypertension). It is often called the "silent killer" because it doesn't always show symptoms. Regularly checking blood pressure and following a healthy diet, such as one low in salt and high in fruits and vegetables, can help keep blood pressure under control.

### Healthy Lifestyle Choices

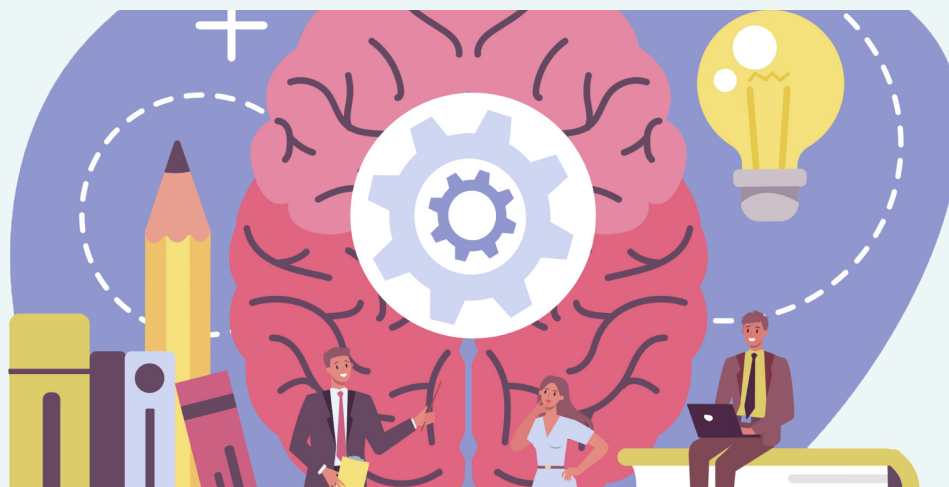
Eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, and avoiding smoking are all ways to reduce stroke risk. A heart-healthy diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids, whole grains, and lean proteins supports both brain and heart health. Regular physical activity strengthens the heart and improves circulation, making it harder for clots to form.

### Stay on Top of Diabetes and Cholesterol

Diabetes and high cholesterol are other risk factors for stroke. Keeping blood sugar levels stable and cholesterol under control is crucial. If your loved one has either of these conditions, make sure they follow their treatment plan and attend regular checkups with their healthcare provider.

As a caregiver, being aware of these risk factors and helping your loved one take steps to manage them can have a significant impact on their brain health. By staying proactive about stroke prevention, you are playing a key role in protecting both your loved one and yourself from the long-term effects of stroke.

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## RECOGNIZING CHANGE

### WHAT SPEECH CHANGES CAN TELL YOU ABOUT YOUR LOVED ONE'S HEALTH

Speech is a vital part of how we connect with others, but when a loved one's communication changes, it can be a sign of underlying neurological or cognitive issues. Caregivers should pay close attention to shifts in speech patterns, as these may provide early warnings of conditions that require medical attention.

One common change is difficulty finding the right words, known as word-finding difficulty or anomia. This can happen occasionally to anyone, but when it becomes frequent, it may indicate mild cognitive impairment (MCI) or early-stage dementia.

Another sign to watch for is slurred or slowed speech, which could suggest a stroke, Parkinson's disease, or other neurological disorders. If speech becomes increasingly monotone or lacks natural inflection, it may be linked to conditions like Parkinson's or depression.

Some individuals may also struggle with forming complete sentences or following conversations. This can be a sign of aphasia, a language disorder often associated with stroke, or progressive neurological diseases like Alzheimer's. Additionally, confusion in speech—such as mixing up words or using incorrect phrases—can indicate cognitive decline.

If you notice persistent speech changes in your loved one, document examples and share them with a healthcare provider. Early intervention can improve quality of life and help manage symptoms more effectively.

By recognizing these signs early, caregivers can play a crucial role in ensuring their loved ones receive the support and care they need.

## FAST FACTS FOR CAREGIVERS

### Easy Ways to Support Your Loved One's Memory

Caring for someone with cognitive decline can be challenging, but simple strategies can make daily life easier for both you and your loved one.

1. **Keep a Routine** – A predictable schedule reduces confusion. Try to keep wake-up times, meals, and bedtime consistent each day.
2. **Use Visual Cues** – Labels, calendars, and sticky notes serve as helpful reminders. A large clock with the date and time can also provide reassurance.
3. **Simplify Choices** – Too many options can be overwhelming. Offer two clear choices, like "Would you like tea or coffee?" instead of "What would you like to drink?"
4. **Encourage Engagement** – Familiar activities, such as folding laundry or sorting items, help maintain a sense of purpose. Listening to music or looking through photo albums can spark memories.
5. **Create a Safe Environment** – Reduce fall risks by keeping pathways clear and ensuring good lighting. Store important items, like keys and glasses, in the same place every day.

Supporting memory isn't just about recall—it's about fostering confidence and independence. Small adjustments can make a big difference in your loved one's well-being.