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# HEALTH



**WORKSHOP TO  
HELP PEOPLE WITH  
'ESSENTIAL TREMOR'**  
Health P. 30

HEALTH

# Workshop to help people with 'essential tremor'



Joan Marie Berringer and her oil on canvas painting, "Gift of the Sea."

PHOTOS BY BENJAMIN HAGER

BY JOSEPH W. FENTON  
Staff Writer

A group will meet in Vero Beach later this month to help people better deal with essential tremor, the shaking affliction that affected actress Katherine Hepburn and impacts nearly 10 million people in the United States.

The essential tremor workshop starts Jan. 25 and will be conducted by Joan Marie Berringer, a winter resident who has had the problem since she was five.

Essential tremor is most common in people older than 65, researchers say, but Berringer notes it can really start at any age. "I got it when I was five years old," she says. "That's why I'm able to help people cope with it and enjoy a good quality of life."

Generally, says Berringer, men get essential tremor in their hands, while women get it in their hands, head and voice. That explains Hepburn's distinctive voice, she says.

The affliction appears to be hereditary, says Berringer, and is passed down from mothers. She says a woman with essential tremor has a 50 percent

chance of passing it down to a child. In her case, her grandmother, mother and sister also had essential tremor.

The original name for essential tremor was "Familiar Tremor" because it was passed down in families. The affliction, she says, is now termed essential tremor because in the medical field, conditions for which there is no known cause are termed "essential."

Berringer says her mother told her she could control it, so that is what she tried to do. "I became an overachiever, attempting to control the tremor as much as I could, until I couldn't. My head began to shake at age 32, similar

**SUPPORT GROUP**

Essential Tremor Support Group  
Wednesday, Jan. 25 at 2 p.m.

Alzheimer and Parkinson  
Association

2300 5th Ave. Suite 1150  
Vero Beach, Fla. 32960

772-563-0505

Joan Marie Berringer:  
703-628-1286

to Katherine Hepburn."

Ten million people are diagnosed with essential tremor, says Berringer, but many people walk around with it and they don't know what they have.

Berringer says she started offering workshops at Georgetown University Hospital about six years ago, providing support and tips for people on how to better cope with essential tremor.

Berringer's group will be the first Florida-based essential tremor support group and will meet at the Alzheimer & Parkinson Association, 2300 5th Ave., Suite 150, Vero Beach, at 2 p.m. She said friends and relatives are invited to attend the meeting.

Berringer says she doesn't have a particular format for her program. "I let them tell their stories," she says, noting many people have kept essential tremor a secret. "They've been hiding it."

People seem to feel relieved when they talk about how they feel and share their own stories, she says.

Berringer, who has a master's degree in education and is a counselor, says one of the first things she will do is offer people a look at nutrition which is a critical issue. "People with essential

## Essential Tremor Support Group

Wednesday, January 25, 2012 2:00 PM

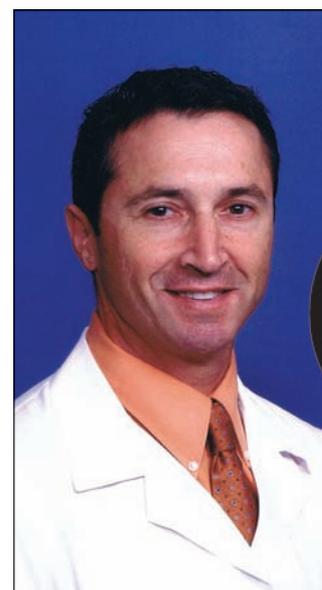


**What is Essential Tremor?**

- It is a condition that affects more than 10 million people in America.
- It contributes to social anxiety and frustration because of the inability to perform everyday tasks that require fine motor skills such as holding a glass, eating soup, and writing.
- It can affect the hands, head, and voice.

Alzheimer & Parkinson Association  
2300 5th Ave, Suite 150  
Vero Beach, FL 32960  
772-563-0505

Friends and family welcome. For more information or to RSVP call Joan Marie at 703-628-1286



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tremor cannot have caffeine and many people don't know that," she says.

The essential tremor support group will meet monthly and also discuss self-care, social situations, healthy habits, doctors who specialize in essential tremor and medications.

One discussion point could be that the National Institute of Health is conducting a study on octinol to determine how effective it might be in treating essential tremor.

Ethanol (the chemical in beer and wine that causes intoxication) reduces tremor in many patients, but patients generally don't use it regularly because it interferes with daily activities.

Studies show that 1-octanol, which is similar to ethanol, may offer the same benefits but with less likelihood of intoxication.

Berringer says her goal is to help people with essential tremor to enjoy a better quality of life.

The social embarrassment of essential tremor can be very frustrating when people reach for a glass of water, eat or write, says Berringer. Others who don't understand it think the person is nervous or weak.

The truth is most people – including some doctors – have no idea what the condition and some people with essen-

tial tremor are misdiagnosed as having Parkinson's.

Parkinson-type tremor occurs when the muscles are at rest; essential tremor occurs during movement, according to Berringer.

"One 80-year-old woman who drove herself to the group was so glad she did," says Berringer. "With tears falling like rain on her face she blurted out, 'I've been ashamed of this my whole life.' That particular lady helped me see a purpose in my life. I knew I needed to open up and share my own stories and find positive ways of living with ET. My first fundraiser for the International Essential Tremor Foundation (IETF) was my 50th birthday party. In lieu of gifts, I asked the guests to make a donation for ET research. I phoned everyone to remind them to attend. 250 people were there."

Berringer says people can lead satisfying lives and she uses herself as an example. "One of my talks is called 'Magic for Manifesting', steps for improving one's lifestyle and enjoying simple pleasures. Following my own dreams, I worked at the National Gallery, became an ocean artist and oil painter with a solo show in Vienna, Va., and had a painting printed in full color in the Washington Post." ■

# Most cancer rates declined over the past two decades

BY JENNIFER LARUE HUGET  
*The Washington Post*

It's mostly good news about cancer incidence and mortality rates in the annual report issued last week by the American Cancer Society.

The report estimates that a million cancer deaths have been averted over the past two decades: That represents an overall decrease in death rates of about 23 percent for men and 15 percent for women between 1990/1991 and 2008, the most recent year for which data are available.

Improvements are particularly notable for the cancers responsible for the largest numbers of deaths: lung, colon, breast and prostate cancer mortality rates all have declined.

But the report draws special attention to the less-common cancers whose incidence rates continue to climb, including those of the pancre-

as, liver, thyroid and kidney. Still, there are huge variations in survivability. While five-year survival rates for thyroid cancer moved from 92 percent in 1975 to 97 percent in 2007, the five-year survival rate for cancers of the pancreas moved from just 2 percent to 6 percent during that period.

The report notes that black men are more likely to get cancer and more likely to die from it than white men.

Black women are slightly less likely to get cancer but more likely to die from it than white women.

The report projects 1,638,910 new cancer cases and 577,190 deaths from cancer will occur in the United States in 2012.

A third of those will stem from tobacco use, the report estimates, and another third will result from overweight and obesity, poor nutrition or physical inactivity. ■



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