

## **Breaking the stigma, Reaching for support**

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Over the past couple of years, I've begun to see a trend. More and more often, I meet with people who were recently diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia and their families reach out for more information about what to do now and what to expect in the future. I'm glad that the stigma is slowly being broken, and that people are not waiting until later in the disease progression to reach out. Dementia that is in early stage is the best time to start building a support network for yourself and your family, as well as learning more about how to best support your brain now and also plan for the future.

### **Understand dementia**

Many families have had dementia poorly explained to them. They are starting from a point with limited knowledge and understanding of the disease that is beginning to change their lives. Understanding what symptoms to expect and how to best function in the stage you are in now is essential. I remember as a caregiver for my grandma, I often struggled with understanding what a 'normal' symptom was and how to deal with it. A lot of families deal with this, and stress trying to respond to new symptoms or issues. I've found that having a good understanding of dementia can help families be more *proactive* rather than *reactive*. Although each individual might have a different disease progression and show different symptoms, establishing a good foundation after diagnosis helps families plan for potential changes, safety issues, and expectations for the future. Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness has partnered with local libraries to have Forget-Me-Not Resource centers that provide a variety of information to learn more about dementia. These resources can help reduce your stress and increase your confidence. There are books, DVDs, and other kits that are specific to people living with dementia and also specific for family members. This month's *Forget-Me-Not Spotlight* article focuses on a book that offers guidance for people living with early stage dementia and their families. This resource especially offers a template of how to stay as independent as possible and support your brain to live well with the disease. For families, it offers ways to help support now and in the future and also take care of yourself throughout the disease process.

### **Connect with people who know about the disease**

Meeting with people who are dealing with the disease themselves helps offer social support and tips for managing challenging symptoms. Attend local presentations about the disease to connect with others affected, as well as ways to understand it a little better. Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness hosts a variety of presentations, ranging from the basics of Alzheimer's to advanced planning with an elder law attorney. There are also a variety of support groups, available in person and online through the Alzheimer's Association at [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org) or [www.alzconnected.org](http://www.alzconnected.org).

Breaking the stigma of Alzheimer's disease and dementia in general takes a lot of bravery and courage. Even though large gains have been made, it's still a very isolating disease.

However, please know that this is not a fight that you are alone in! There is a community willing to listen, support, and when you're ready, help you learn.

*Memory Moment is a monthly article written by Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, highlighting topics related to Alzheimer's disease and related dementia, caregiving, and healthy brain aging. For an archive of previous articles, please visit [www.effinghamalz.org/inthepress](http://www.effinghamalz.org/inthepress). If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nosbisch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.*