

# Breaking Down the Stigma

There are a lot of misconceptions about an Alzheimer's diagnosis. It doesn't mean people should avoid you or treat you differently. Some may not even be doing so intentionally, but if you encounter negative language, beliefs, jokes or avoidance, you can turn it into an opportunity to clear up myths and educate others.

## You Can Take Action

If you or a loved one has Alzheimer's disease, here's how sharing your experience can help reduce the stigma around it:<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>

**Be open about your diagnosis.** People are more open to changing their point of view when they have direct personal experience. That's why talking about your Alzheimer's diagnosis with those you trust can help challenge assumptions and build awareness. It may even get them thinking about their own brain health and taking positive steps.

**Educate and inform.** If you talk about Alzheimer's openly and in a matter-of-fact way, it will help people see that there's no need for them to be afraid or avoid you. Sharing the facts about the disease and how it has affected you or a loved one can help to change any false beliefs or assumptions they might have.

**Stay positive.** People sometimes mistake the challenges of an Alzheimer's diagnosis with an absence of quality of life. Challenge these myths. Share your experiences and talk about the hobbies, groups, interactions, or other activities that you or a loved one are still able to enjoy.

**Don't take it personally.** Any stigma you encounter about your Alzheimer's diagnosis is about the disease, not you. Most often, any negativity comes from the other person's false beliefs or fears. Try to teach them the facts and show them how they can be open, honest, and supportive.

**Be patient.** Old or misinformed beliefs can sometimes take more than one conversation to be replaced with informed, positive ones. It may take some time before some people feel comfortable around you or your loved one. Just stay open, positive and direct, and don't let their negative reactions discourage you.

**Let them know how they can help.** Sharing your diagnosis can also bring out people's natural instinct to help. For those who ask, let them know how they can support you or the Alzheimer's community. If there's nothing you need from them, you might suggest they volunteer or donate to an Alzheimer's organization in your area.

1. <https://www.alz.org/help-support/i-have-alz/overcoming-stigma>
2. <https://alzheimersdisease.net/living/reducing-stigma/>
3. <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/stigma-and-AD-brief-july-2015.pdf>
4. <https://alzheimer.ca/en/about-dementia/stigma-against-dementia>