

I want to change the image of dementia.

I think many people have a negative image of dementia that denies a person's personality, such as "When you get dementia, you can't do anything. You become a different person and become useless. It's a disease you never want to get." I want to change that dark image into something more positive.

First, I want to tell you why I started thinking about dementia in this way. My grandfather started forgetting things a few years ago and was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. My parents were busy with work, so I spent a lot of time with my grandparents. My grandfather is a very kind, humorous, and sincere person. He loved traveling and would drive his car and go everywhere, even to Hokkaido. It was my grandfather who taught me sports such as cycling, skiing, and basketball, and took me to various places all over Japan. I love my grandfather and respect him very much. If someone asked me, "Who is your ideal man?" I would always answer that it is my grandfather. My cool grandfather developed dementia and was told to give up his number one hobby, driving a car. His short-term memory declined, and he began to ask the same questions over and over again. I remember my grandfather saying, "I never want to get Alzheimer's." Now that he has it, it seems like he wants to hide it from those around him. My grandfather, who was always full of confidence, now spends more days hunched over and without energy. I find this very sad.

I think the reason why people want to hide their dementia from those around them is because of the bad images it has. I think the first thing that causes suffering to those with dementia and their families is the negative emotion of "I have become a person who can't do anything, because I have dementia."

Secondly, I think it is important to discard prejudices and preconceptions. For example, instead of thinking, "That person has become angry because of dementia. He has become silent. His personality has changed," try thinking that maybe he is having trouble speaking due to a decline in cognitive function. Maybe he is no longer able to understand what the people around him are saying. If you make an effort to understand with this perspective, you will no longer look at them with discrimination and will be able to treat them kindly, which will reduce their anxiety and loneliness.

Anyone can get dementia, like catching a cold. Currently, it is predicted that about one in five people over the age of 65 will develop dementia. I think that everyone, from children to adults, should learn what kind of disease it is. By combining modern technology such as GPS and smartphone apps, we should be able to reduce dementia-related challenges and make society an easier place to live in. Dementia does not mean that you suddenly become a different person. Please do not treat someone as if they were a burden.

I want to strongly tell my grandfather, "Even if you develop dementia, my feelings for you will not change. To me, you will always be the most wonderful superhero."

Thank you.

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Even if You Have Dementia