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Taking Action Gives Hope For Those With Memory Loss In Alzheimer's

For two weeks last month, I spent several hours a day with 13 persons living with mild cognitive impairment or early stage dementia and their care partners, in a program called HABIT (Healthy Actions to Benefit Independence and Thinking).

The 10-day program involves daily cognitive compensation training, brain fitness activities, support groups, wellness education, and a fitness/movement program. HABIT builds on the strength that persons with mild memory problems often retain the ability to learn new habits.

These specific "habits" - if practiced consistently - may help compensate for memory loss, possibly extending independence and improving self efficacy. I'll write more about HABIT in an upcoming blog. For general information, visit the resources tab on this page.

The 26 individuals who participated in HABIT last month shared some common reasons for doing so. First, they believed that an early diagnosis doesn't help much if you don't understand what it means or what to do. They came with many questions and uncertainties about their diagnosis. Second, they were committed to doing something to make the situation better. Taking action gave them hope.

It's difficult to describe what transpired in the two weeks and almost fifty hours we spent together, but clearly relationships grew and genuine bonds were made. Many faced for the first time the challenging step of accepting their diagnosis or that of their loved one. Care partners began the process of adapting to a new "normal" and although not easy, found immeasurable comfort in one another.

Some began to look at what may lie ahead with both a sense of empowerment and an appreciation for living fully in the present. Persons with memory loss gained a renewed sense that they're individuals with rich experiences, accomplishments, and spirit, and that a diagnosis of memory loss doesn't take that away.

I'm sure my words can't fully capture the experience for these individuals or the profound wisdom they offered me or one another. Nevertheless, I'll conclude with some of their words that will stay in my heart for a very long time.

"I am now open to our new life and prepared emotionally to move forward." - Spouse of someone with mild cognitive impairment

"The disease has given me the gift of loving my husband all over again." - Spouse of someone with mild cognitive impairment

"I find Alzheimer's so freeing, you don't have to remember yesterday or tomorrow, you just live today." - Person with early stage dementia

For more information on HABIT, please email customerservice [at] mayoclinic.com. Free Medical Advice published By [Dr Vivienne Balonwu](#).

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