

WAYS TO ENCOURAGE EATING

- **Encouragement to drink** - People with dementia may not be aware when they are thirsty so you will need to encourage them to drink liquids. Just placing a drink in front of them doesn't mean they will drink it. Describe the drink and where it is so if they have a sight problem they know where to find it. Offer a variety of drinks such as squash/water served in jugs, tea, coffee, hot chocolate, ice lollies, and foods with high water content such as melon and jelly.
- **Eating little and often** - Provide small portions and offer a second helping, rather than providing large portions which can seem overwhelming and put a person off even attempting to eat the meal. Try providing 4 or 5 small dishes that can be eaten throughout the day.
- **Healthy Meals** - People living with dementia should be able to enjoy food and can aim to have a healthy and balanced diet by eating plenty of fruits and vegetables, basing meals on starch foods and having 2 portions of fish per week (as recommended for general public)

Examples of balanced meals include:

- Porridge made with full fat milk plus fruit such as sliced banana or berries
- Vegetable or lentil soup with added cream and a bread roll
- Mini quiche, scotch egg or fish cakes with potato wedges and salad
- Mini portions of cottage pie, or fish pie with vegetables
- Small cheese omelette or scrambled egg with grilled tomato

Tastes can change as dementia develops and stronger flavours are preferred. Try using mild spices and flavour enhancers such as herbs, stronger cheese and marmite. If a person has a sweet tooth, try and encourage sweet foods that are also nutritious such as

- apple pie or fruit cake with a piece of cheese
- Chopped banana or baked apple with custard
- Rice pudding with berries or other fruit

For further information see the Alzheimer's Society fact sheet 511



HELPING PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA TO EAT WELL

For many people with dementia, the changes that are experienced as dementia progresses can have an impact on the whole mealtime experience. These changes can result in weight loss, dehydration or even weight gain. Malnutrition and dehydration can contribute to the risk of developing delirium. The more we know about a person with dementia, the easier it is to meet their nutritional needs.

THINGS TO CHECK

There are a range of reasons why a person with dementia may refuse food, for example, they may have difficulties using cutlery, making decisions, or seeing and recognising food. There are a few things you need to take into consideration and check such as:

- Tiredness

This may cause people not to eat or to stop eating part way through a meal. Encourage them to eat when they are most alert. Also, try giving them small portions and finger snacks at frequent intervals rather than sticking to mealtimes.

- Lack of appetite

With dementia the interest in eating and mealtimes is likely to change. A person's sense of taste or smell may decrease making food seem less appealing.

Their ability to prepare meals and eat independently could also decline. Difficulties chewing or digesting food may develop. Medication can also affect appetite.

As dementia progresses the person may struggle to use a knife and fork, no longer recognise the food or forget to open their mouth as food

approaches. Forgetting to wear glasses or hearing aids may also interfere with the desire to eat.

- **Lack of ability to concentrate**

The person may not be able to stay focused until they have finished a meal. If the meal goes on for too long it may get cold or it all becomes too much to cope with. Frequently providing small portions, or finger foods may help.

- **Pain**

If your loved one is in pain causing eating to be uncomfortable, this could be caused by painful teeth, bad fitting dentures or sore gums. Regular mouth checks and good oral hygiene are important.

- **Constipation**

This is a common problem which can be very uncomfortable, resulting in feeling bloated and avoiding eating. Exercise, extra fluids and fibre-rich foods may help (especially soluble fibre from fruit and vegetables). If it persists, consult a GP.

- **Depression**

Loss of appetite can be a sign of depression. If you suspect this, consult your GP who can provide effective treatment.

- **Everyone is different**

We all have different preferences and needs. Dementia will progress in various ways so different eating solutions will need to be used at various stages. If one thing doesn't work or stops working because the situation has changed, try something else. Some people start to like foods they never liked before so encourage new foods

All this means that there are dangers of dehydration and lack of nourishment which increase the risk of infections, reduced capacity for healing, low blood pressure and other problems. This makes it very important to encourage eating, identify any related problems and find solutions. If a person appears to be losing weight refer to the GP.

OPPORTUNITIES - Try to view mealtimes as an opportunity rather than a challenge. For someone with dementia, meals mark the time of day which helps them to keep track of time.

STIMULATING APPETITE

Encourage the person with dementia to talk about favourite foods, from childhood memories, or special occasions, to encourage the digestive juices to flow. This provides the opportunity for people to make choices, chat and reminisce about past accomplishments through statements such as 'This reminds me of my sixteenth birthday party, you made the most enormous birthday cake for me, do you remember?' This ensures meals are a social activity, and a time to connect with others.

Stimulate the senses with the sounds of food preparation and smells of cooking. Encourage the person with dementia to be involved by:

- Laying the table and gather dirty plates afterwards, maybe even helping to dry up.
- Prepare the food in some way such as stirring mixture, garnishing the food or preparing vegetables (this can also help the person retain their functional skills).
- Picking herbs or fruit in the garden, or watering the plants

Keep in mind their meal time rituals and preferences and modify them to fit into the current situation. They may have always eaten at a specific time, have cultural or religious food habits such as saying a prayer before meals, or particular likes and dislikes. (i.e. the lady who always used to wear her apron at meal times or the gentleman who liked to read the paper at breakfast, once they were given these items they were happy to sit down and eat).

Physical activity is good for the person's wellbeing and can increase appetite. If there is little or no activity they may not feel hungry. Even for the very frail, gentle movement to music can be introduced.

This guidance has been extracted from the following sources: Alzheimer's Society, carewatch.co.uk, Bournemouth university. For references or further information please contact the dementia advice service on 01252 624808 or by email dementiaadvicehartushmoor@andovermind.org.uk

