



Dementia and Nutrition

As dementia progresses, forgetfulness, poor appetite, problems swallowing and changes in how food tastes may limit the amount of food eaten. This can make it hard for the person with dementia to get enough nutrients to stay healthy.

Tips to encourage healthy eating and a balanced diet

- Gently remind the person to eat and drink. Handing the person a cup of water instead of placing it on the table may encourage the person to drink.
- Eating with others may remind the person what to do and how to eat. Showing the person how to use an utensil to eat may also help.
- Make mealtimes a pleasant experience and avoid distractions or loud noises. Playing music softly may be helpful.
- Check the temperature of the food as the person may not have the judgment to avoid burning himself or herself.
- Offer a variety of foods, but limit the number of foods offered at one time. Too many choices may feel overwhelming.
- Finger foods are easy to eat and encourage independence for meals and snacks. Some examples of finger foods are:
 - Boiled egg, quartered
 - Crackers with cheese
 - Fish sticks or chicken nuggets
 - Fruit slices
 - Muffins
 - Pita with hummus
 - Plain whole grain pancakes or waffles quartered
 - Raw vegetables with ranch dip
 - Sandwiches
 - Slices of banana with peanut butter
 - Small pieces of roasted chicken
 - Soup served in a mug
 - Toast
 - Yogurt tubes
- Offer smaller meals more often instead of 3 large meals each day. Offer smaller portions more often.
- Offer the foods and drinks the person likes to encourage eating.
- Don't worry about being neat. Let the person feed himself or herself as much as possible.



Special concerns

- **If the person has a dry mouth**, add sauce or gravy to food. Encourage drinking during the meal.
- **If the person eats too much**, try fruits and vegetables as snacks instead of sweets. Activities to reduce boredom may also help.
- **If the person eats too little and is losing weight**, try making high calorie smoothies or use liquid nutrition drinks. Drinking calories may be easier than eating them.
- **If the person has constipation**, slowly increase fiber in the diet. Sources of fiber include fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grain breads and cereals. Encourage the person to eat at least 5 fruits and vegetables each day. Walking and drinking plenty of fluids each day may also help constipation. Talk with your loved one's doctor about a stool softener or fiber supplement if these tips do not work.
- **If dehydration is a problem**, encourage the person to drink at least 8, 8-ounce cups of caffeine-free fluids, such as water and juice, each day.

Be creative to try to increase the person's interest in food. Fortified foods and supplements may be needed, but first try offering favorite foods and foods higher in nutrients and calories. Talk to the person's doctor about any eating or drinking concerns before starting any supplements. You may also want to speak with a registered dietitian.

For more information

Visit these websites:

- Alzheimer's Association at www.alz.org
- Family Caregiver Alliance at www.caregiver.org

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

For more health information, go to patienteducation.osumc.edu or contact the Library for Health Information at 614-293-3707 or health-info@osu.edu.