



Feeding with Patience — When Mealtimes Become Hard





Why Mealtimes Change

Dementia affects appetite, coordination, and awareness of hunger. It's not just picky eating.

Eating becomes a sensory, emotional task.

Appetite Changes

Dementia can reduce hunger signals or change food preferences dramatically.

Coordination Difficulties

Using utensils becomes challenging as motor skills decline.

Sensory Experience

Eating transforms from a basic need to a complex emotional and sensory challenge.



Set the Scene for Calm



Keep table settings simple

Reduce confusion with clear, uncluttered place settings.



Reduce noise and distractions

Create a peaceful environment without overwhelming stimuli.



Offer meals at consistent times

Establish a routine to provide structure and predictability.



Small Portions, Big Comfort



Finger foods can be easier to manage

Foods that can be picked up maintain independence when utensils become challenging.



Choose soft, easy-to-chew textures

Gentle textures reduce the physical effort of eating and swallowing.



Use favourite, familiar foods

Familiar tastes can trigger positive memories and increase interest in eating.



Encourage, Don't Pressure

Sit beside them

Your presence provides comfort and gentle guidance during meals.

Eat together to model the behaviour

Demonstrating eating can trigger mimicking responses and provide social motivation.

Praise small bites: "That's perfect."

Positive reinforcement creates a supportive atmosphere and encourages continued eating.



Keep Hydration Easy

Offer water regularly

Try a straw or sippy cup to make drinking more accessible and less likely to spill.

Small, frequent sips throughout the day can be more effective than large amounts at once.

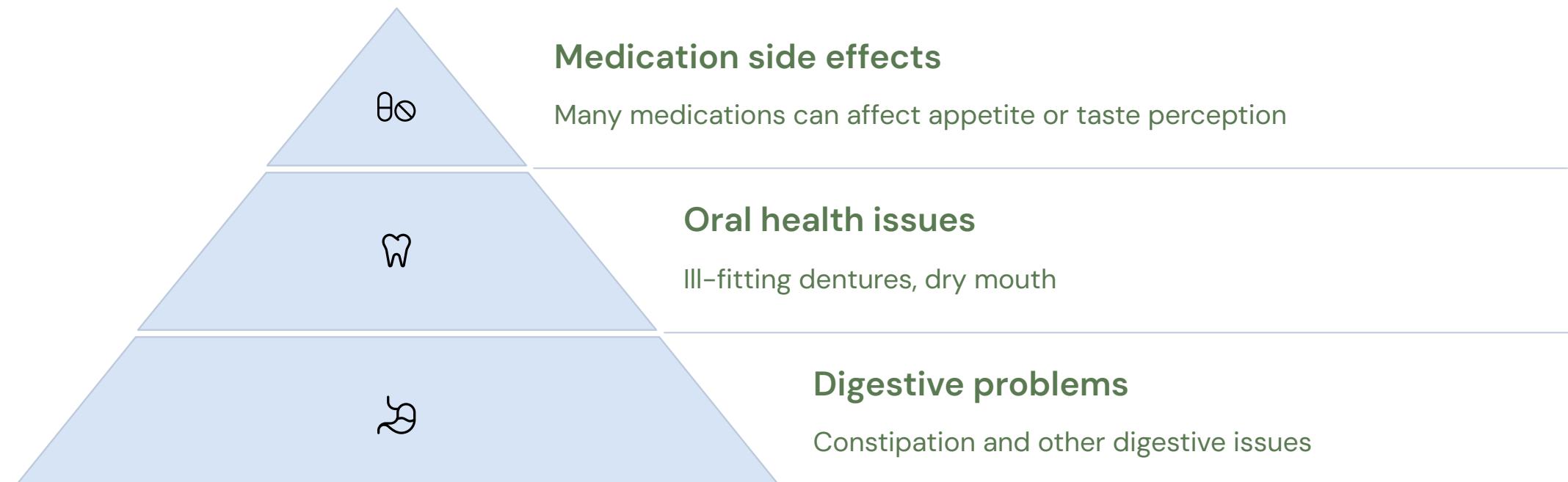
Alternative hydration sources

Offer juicy fruits or soup if plain water is refused.

Foods with high water content can contribute significantly to daily hydration needs.

Flavoured waters or herbal teas might be more appealing than plain water.

Watch for Physical Causes



Sometimes hunger isn't the problem — pain is

Turn Meals Into Connection

Light conversation

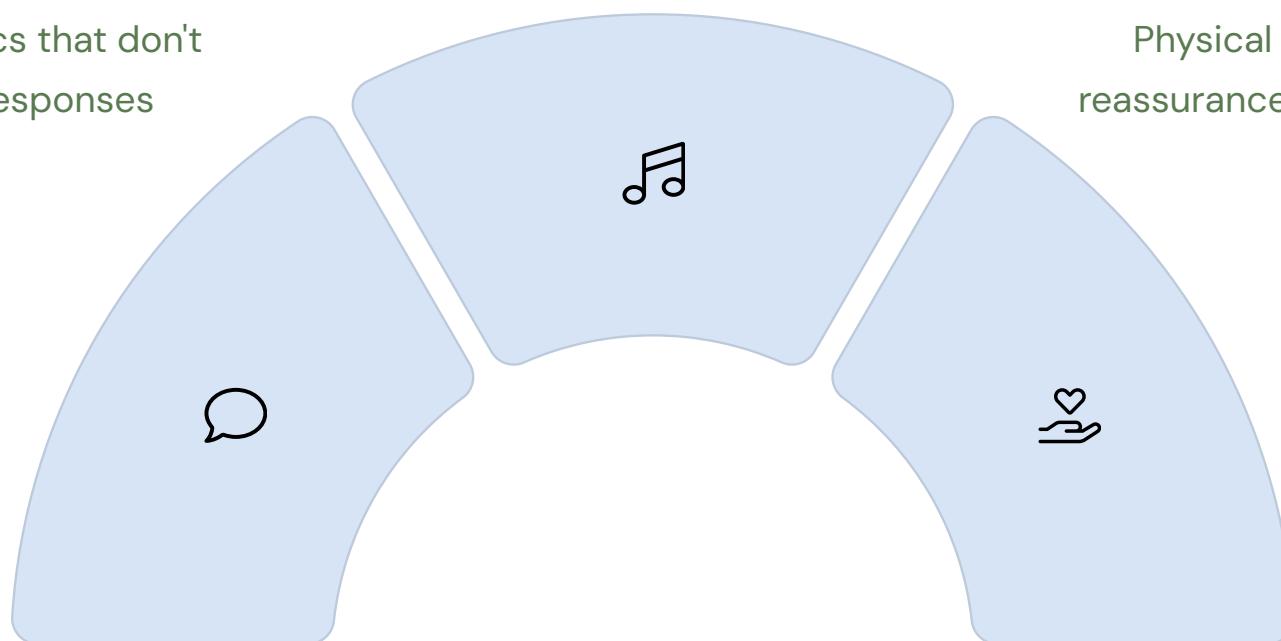
Simple, positive topics that don't require complex responses

Familiar music

Gentle background music from their era can create a comforting atmosphere

A warm touch on the hand

Physical connection provides reassurance and emotional support



When They Refuse to Eat



Offer again later without pressure

Timing can significantly impact willingness to eat



Try favourite treats or small snacks

Familiar favourites may be more appealing



Let go of the "perfect" meal

Focus on nutrition and connection, not ideal portions



Ask Navigate Dementia



How do I encourage my loved one to eat?

Get personalized strategies for your specific situation.

What are good dementia-friendly meals?

Learn about appropriate food options that maintain dignity and nutrition.

How can I keep them hydrated gently?

Discover creative approaches to ensure adequate fluid intake.