

Swallowing issues

As dementia progresses, swallowing issues can become more common.

This can lead to:

- food or drink getting into the lungs instead of the stomach – this could lead to [chest infections](#) or [pneumonia](#)
- losing weight
- [dehydration](#)

Over time, the person you are caring for may find it hard to say when they are hungry or thirsty.

Food and drink intake will need to be monitored every day to make sure they are eating and drinking enough.

How to adapt to changes in swallowing

A person with a dementia may have difficulty with some types of food and fluids.

This can lead to them spitting out lumps or holding food in the mouth.

To help:

- give them a soft, moist diet
- avoid hard, dry or fibrous foods that need a lot of chewing like steak, bacon and wheaten bread

- use gravy or sauces to moisten food
- encourage small sips of fluids

How to help if a person is spitting out lumps

A person with a dementia may begin to spit out food.

Things that can help include:

- avoiding foods with lumps, bits or mixed textures like crumbly biscuits, soup with bits, food with skins or pips
- making sure food is soft or smooth in consistency throughout

How to help if a person forgets to swallow

A person with a dementia may forget to swallow.

Things that can help include:

- alternating temperature and taste within a meal, for example, sweet and savoury food or hot and very cold foods or fluids
- offering sips of ice cold drink before a meal or in between mouthfuls
- giving verbal prompts to swallow
- trying placing an empty spoon in the mouth between mouthfuls to help stimulate a swallow

What to do if food stays in the mouth

A person with a dementia may begin to keep food in their mouth at the end of a meal.

To help:

- check their mouth after meals and encourage or help them brush their teeth or clean dentures, as food left in the mouth can cause infections and bad breath
- keeping the person upright for a short time
- if food remains in the mouth despite these attempts to encourage a swallow, you should safely try to remove it

If the person you are care for keeps coughing or choking when they eat or drink, contact their GP for advice. They may need a speech and language therapy assessment.

If they find it hard to swallow tablets, ask their GP or a pharmacist for advice.

Help and support

As a carer, there are many ways you can help support them in their everyday life and activities.

Further information on dementia and support services is available at the link below:

- [Help and support for people living with a dementia](#)
-