

Changes in Eating

When a person has dementia, their eating habits and abilities change. They might forget to eat or try to eat non-food items like lotion or cleaning products. They might forget that they already ate and ask to eat again just after finishing a meal. They might crave sweets, have trouble seeing the food on their plate, or have difficulty using spoons and forks. Eventually the person with dementia will lose the ability to say when they feel hungry or thirsty and they will have trouble swallowing regular food and drinks. Weight loss and choking become a concern. It is important to keep track of the person's weight and look for signs of difficulty swallowing such as coughing, gagging, and drooling. Other things that may affect eating and drinking include tooth pain or mouth sores, breathing problems, illness, medication changes, depression, drowsiness, or lack of exercise. It is important to talk to the person's doctor about any weight loss or signs of choking.

IF	THEN
The person forgets to eat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a routine for meals to help them remember. • Try a written schedule if the person can read. • Set out food with simple instructions (i.e., a bowl, a box of cereal, a spoon, and a note that says the milk is in the refrigerator). • Try an alarm or telephone reminders. • Eat together or arrange friendly visits around mealtimes. • Try meal delivery or communal meals at a senior center or day program. • Place snacks they like near their favorite place to sit.
IF	THEN
The person eats too much because they forget they already ate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a routine that includes meals, socializing, exercise, and other activities to prevent too much focus on food. • Offer low calorie snacks if they insist on eating again (i.e., fruit, veggies, popcorn without butter, soup broth, cottage cheese, sardines). • Encourage fluid intake when they request food after just eating. Try saying in a matter-of-fact tone of voice, "Oh we just ate eggs and toast, now it is time to drink this glass of water/tea/lemonade" or try holding up a drink and simply saying, "cheers."

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redirect them to another activity when they request food after just eating. Try saying, "Let's go for a walk and enjoy the sunshine/fall leaves/fresh air." • Consider whether this is a problem worth trying to fix if limiting food intake causes conflict or distress.
IF	THEN
If the person tries to eat non-food items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a routine for meals to make sure the person is getting enough to eat. • Hide or secure toxic cleaning products. • Label liquid soap, lotion, toothpaste, and other toiletries if the person is able to read. • Remove clutter from kitchen and dining areas to make food more visible. • Place snacks near the person's favorite place to sit.
IF	THEN
If the person does not eat enough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss any weight loss or signs of choking with the person's doctor. • Check the person's mouth for redness, swollen gums, tooth problems, or mouth sores. • Help the person clean their teeth and mouth twice a day. • Offer one or two foods at a time so the person is not overwhelmed by a full plate. • Serve finger foods or food in a bowl to make eating easier. • Use a solid colored plate or bowl to make the food more visible, or try placing a colored placemat under a white plate or bowl. • Serve colorful foods that look appealing. • Try soft moist foods if the person eats slowly or takes a long time to chew their food (cooked vegetables, canned fruit, pasta with sauce, hot cereal, mashed potatoes with gravy, creamy casserole, meatloaf, etc.). • Reduce clutter, noise, and other distractions during mealtime.

- Eat with the person and provide visual, verbal, and tactile cues to help them stay on task.
- Use hand-over-hand assistance to get them started.
- Honor their food preferences; many people with dementia prefer sweet flavors.
- Offer foods high in fat and protein to maintain calorie intake (ice cream, cheese, nuts, butter, avocado, eggs, bacon, etc.).

More Information:

- Conversations with Caregivers: Meals video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6k7BtYVXnYE>
- Helping someone with moderate dementia eat: <https://www.dementiacarecentral.com/video/eating/>
- Smoothie recipes for dysphagia: <https://dailycaring.com/10-quick-and-easy-dysphagia-diet-recipes-for-swallowing-problems-5-ingredients-or-less/>
- Other recipes for dysphagia: <https://www.easytoswallow.co.uk/>
- Meal set-up for someone with Parkinson's or Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (PSP): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGVnQNjIHAY&list=UUo_GfvM5DYBfdRRwN9Adpuw&index=22
- Helping someone with advanced dementia eat and drink: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNPAESrllqQ>
- Dementia friendly assistive tableware: <http://www.eatwellset.com/shop>
- Adaptive spoons: <https://www.liftware.com>
- Budget friendly recipe ideas: <http://eatfresh.org/>

Simple Finger Food Ideas:

- Peanut butter, tuna, avocado or grilled cheese sandwich squares
- Hummus and tomato stuffed in pita triangles
- Muffins
- Veggie sticks
- Fruit slices
- Cheese cubes or slices
- Quesadilla or English muffin pizza
- Hardboiled egg
- Bagel or toast
- Granola or breakfast bar
- Dried fruit
- Nuts