

Eating and Drinking Well with Dementia – Tips for Carers

Encouraging appetite:

- Find out about the person, their likes and dislikes, their routines, preferences and needs and what they can physically manage.
- Involve the person in preparing the vegetables/food or laying the table.
- Ensure food looks and smells appealing, and is colourful.
- Regular snacks and small meals maybe better than set mealtimes, including night time snacks.
- Offer small portions rather than overloading the plate, you can always offer seconds!
- Keep the food warm throughout the meal.
- Try different types of food including milkshakes or smoothies.
- Tastes change, so experiment with stronger flavours or sweet foods.
- Do not withhold desserts if the savoury course has not been eaten.
- Positive encouragement and gentle reminders to eat and explain what the food is.
- Ensure a relaxed friendly atmosphere.
- Try to use eating and drinking as an opportunity for activity and social stimulation.
- If the person is having difficulty chewing or swallowing – try soft foods:
 - e.g. scrambled egg and stewed apple in the first instance.
- If you think pureed food needs to be considered – seek advice immediately from the GP or Dietitian who may refer you to a Speech and Language Therapist.
- If the person is showing signs of losing weight seek advice from the GP immediately.

Catering for changing tastes:

- If the person has a preference for sweet foods, fruit maybe a healthier option.
- Add small amounts of sugar or honey to savoury food e.g. gravy and sauces.
- Sweet sauces or chutneys can be served with savoury dinners.
- Herbs and spices can be used to enhance flavours.
- Try new foods which have not been eaten before.

As dementia progresses:

- The person may not recognise items and what they are for e.g. put non-food items into their mouth i.e. napkins or soap – remove from view items the person may confuse for food.
- The person may have difficulty using cutlery – serve finger foods e.g. sausages, fish fingers, vegetable sticks, potato wedges.
- The person may have difficulty sitting for meals, have finger foods around the house they can help themselves to anytime.
- Always offer alternatives if the person is not eating.



- Ensure food is always available, easy to see both on the plate and the immediate environment, available throughout the day so person can eat whenever and wherever they want.
- Be patient!

Tackling overeating:

- Ensure the person has an activity to do so they do not feel bored or lonely
- Leave bite-size fruit e.g. chopped bananas, orange segments or grapes within easy reach to snack on as desired.
- If problem persists, of excess weight gain, ask GP for a referral to a dietitian.

Encouraging fluid intake:

- Offer hot and cold drinks throughout the day.
- Whenever the person is eating something have a drink nearby where it can be seen.
- Use a clear glass so the contents can be seen or a brightly coloured cup/mug.
- Always describe the drink especially if the person has partial sight.
- Make sure the cup, mug or glass is suitable – e.g. not too heavy or a difficult shape.
- Specially adapted cups can be purchased and may be useful to assist with drinking. If possible, offer the person the cup or mug and put it where they can see it.
- Foods high in fluid can help e.g. gravy, jelly, ice cream, water melon, cucumber, etc.

Improving the eating environment:

- Let the person choose what they eat and where they would like to sit.
- Eat with the person, make eating a social activity and they can follow your example.
- Try to ensure the person maintains their independence as long as possible.
- Make the environment stimulating to the senses– sounds and smells of cooking and food – familiar sights such as tablecloths, aprons, flowers may help.
- Some people enjoy eating with company others prefer being alone. Sometimes this may vary from one meal to another.
- Try to ensure the environment is uncluttered, a pleasant place to eat and ensure the person has enough space.
- Ensure the person has a comfortable eating position.
- The eating environment should be calm and relaxing some soft background music may help.
- Colours can assist the person to differentiate the food, have different colours for the food, plate and tablecloth – avoid patterns.
- Try not to worry about the mess – it is more important for the person to eat than be tidy.
- Any food is good food if someone is losing weight.

