Dementia a guide to food problems

First things first
Look for things that can interfere with appetite and food

**Constipation or diarrhoea**
see the G.P. There are many things that can upset bowel function.

**Poor dentition.**
Can the dentist help?

**Medication**
Discuss with the pharmacist, G.P. or hospital doctor.

**Poor eyesight.**
Can the Optician help?

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Eating and drinking
expect the unexpected

Changes in eating habits and eating problems are common in dementia and can greatly affect the relationship with food, and the mechanical processes of eating.

Lifelong food habits and preferences may change and keep changing. Foods that were enjoyed may no longer be a favourite. Foods normally disliked may become favourites.

Mealtimes can become a frustrating time, but remember dementia can limit understanding in the person affected.

Keeping calm and using distraction by changing the subject can sometimes help.

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Before A Meal
As far as possible eating should take place in calm, familiar surroundings without distractions e.g. loud T.V. or radio. If eating is slow plate warmers can be useful.

Eating with familiar people can help to prompt memory and generally people eat better when in company. Talking about favourite meals and foods or special occasions (favourite restaurant meals) can help with intake. If possible try to provide one course at a time to avoid confusion.

Plates are better kept to one solid colour, blue, yellow and red are easiest to recognise and make food stand out. Contrast the colour of the plate with the table/ or tablecloth.

Put the bare minimum objects on the table to avoid distraction.

Try keeping a list of current preferences but still retry foods now and again. Try to adapt to food challenges, but be reassured there may never be a perfect answer.

Hunger or thirst may no longer be recognised, or a person may forget to eat and drink. Have frequent small meals and snacks and offer regular drinks.

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Try the NHS Forth Valley website for more information.
The Importance of Fluids

- It is very important to keep an eye on how much fluid is being drunk, as a reduced fluid intake can increase confusion and contribute to urinary infections and constipation.

- Everybody should aim to drink approx 2 litres every day; that's about 8-10 cups. Clear plastic cups/bottles can be useful as they allow the liquid to be identified.

- If someone has a regular/favourite cup they use, it can help to use this as much as possible.

Nutritional Care in the Advanced Stages of Dementia

- Gradually more help to eat and drink will be needed and at this stage food & fluid intake usually reduces.

- As dementia advances, quality of life is the priority; this includes trying to reduce anxiety and frustration around eating and drinking.

Further Information
Alzheimer Scotland: [www.alzscot.org.uk](http://www.alzscot.org.uk)  Tel: 0808 808 3000
Stirling University Dementia Centre: [www.dementia.stir.ac.uk](http://www.dementia.stir.ac.uk)  Tel: 01786 467740
Age UK  [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)  Tel: 0800 169 655
Patient UK: [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)