

Eating and Drinking with Dementia

Changes in eating habits and eating problems are very common in dementia and can greatly affect appetite.

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

Hunger or thirst may no longer be recognised, or a person may forget to eat and drink. Gradually more help to eat and drink will be needed and at this stage food and 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 for everyone involved.

Constipation and diarrhoea, if this is an on-going issue, speak with your GP.

If you have dental problems or ill fitting dentures try to get this sorted.

Eye sight may be poor or worsening making it difficult to see food. This can be checked by the opticians.

Things to think about which may affect eating and drinking

Consider other things like pain and mood as this can reduce your appetite.

Certain medications can affect your appetite you can ask for this to be reviewed.

Importance of Fluids

If you do not drink enough this can lead to other problems including: urinary tract infections, increased confusion and dizziness/falls.

- Aim for 1.5 to 2 litres of fluids per day which is 6-8 cups.
- You may need to be reminded to drink more due to not feeling thirsty.
- Good sources of fluid could include: milk, homemade smoothies made with milk or yoghurt, hot chocolate/Ovaltine, full sugar fizzy drinks, jellies, soups, fruit juice, ice-lollies and ice-cream.
- Sometimes fluids can be filling, if this is the case, have these between meals.



Ideas and Tips

Meals should be taken in calm, familiar surroundings without distractions e.g. loud T.V. or radio.

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.



Keep the table simple. Avoid having too many objects to limit distraction.

Coloured plates/cups/mat can be helpful especially if eye-sight is poor.

Give prompts to help encourage intake - naming foods, placing cutlery in hand and offering reassurance.

If getting up from the table and wandering or recognising cutlery is an issue, foods which can be eaten by hand may be a better option e.g. sandwiches, chips, sausage rolls, cheese cubes, yoghurts tubes, chicken drumsticks etc.

Have frequent meals, snacks and offer regular drinks.

Try keeping a list of current favourite foods. If something isn't eaten then it can be tried again later.

If appetite is poor, food can be enriched by adding extra cream, butter, cheese, jam, mayonnaise, dressings etc.



Recipe for Enriched Milk

Mix 2-4 tablespoons of milk powder into 1 pint of full fat milk
Enriched milk contains extra calories (energy in the diet) and protein.
Use in soups, cereals, sauces, puddings, milky drinks such as chocolate, all milk coffee, hot malted drinks.