

# Strategies For Mealtime Challenges



**In this factsheet, you will learn about:**



Some mealtime challenges that people with dementia may experience



Strategies to adapt mealtimes based on the needs and preferences of people living with dementia



## **Forgetting to eat or drink**

- Schedule meals and snacks at a similar time each day
- Set an alarm or leave a note as a reminder to eat and drink
- Call around the mealtime to ask the person what they are planning to eat
- Eat with others because they can help to keep track when it is time for the next meal and/or snack



## **Difficulty finding items**

- Label cupboards to indicate what is inside
- Keep commonly used items accessible by being within reach and visible
- For a specific mealtime activity, like making coffee, store all the supplies in the same area

**Remember to start by asking if someone needs help,  
and then provide support as requested!**



## Difficulty cooking or using kitchen appliances

---

- Create cue cards with instructions on how to use an appliance
- Set a timer to indicate when something is done cooking
- Use appliances with automatic shut-off, or put a sticker on the “off” button for appliances as a reminder
- Work in pairs for kitchen duties



## Difficulty chewing or swallowing

---

- Sit up straight with head facing forward
- Take time to chew carefully, and pause to swallow between bites
- Prepare food so that it is easy to chew and swallow: chop, mash, shred, or purée foods with a knife, blender, or food processor
- Add gravy, cream, or other sauces to help soften and moisten food
- See a dentist or denturist if chewing is a challenge
- Visit a primary healthcare provider to ask for a referral to a speech language pathologist if swallowing is a challenge
- Learn First Aid in case choking occurs



## Difficulty self-feeding or hydrating

---

- Use adaptive utensils or vessels as needed, such as weighted utensils, curved utensils, or lidded cups
- Place mats or a wet cloth underneath dishware to prevent slipping
- Serve finger foods to make eating easier, including sandwiches, wraps, or chopped vegetables and fruits



## Eating inedible items

---

- Remove inedible items, such as wrappers, candles, or centre pieces from the table
- Season meals in the kitchen with spices and condiments to limit the number of items on the table
- Use durable utensils and dishware to prevent them from being broken, chewed, and/or swallowed – avoid plastic when possible



## Eating too much

---

- Eat slowly and appreciate the food's appearance, smell, texture, and taste
- Have protein and high fibre foods at each meal and snacks
- Drink water before, during, and between meals because thirst can sometimes be confused with hunger
- Set out vegetables, fruits, and other healthy low-calorie snacks or side dishes on the table



## Eating too quickly

---

- Serve one food item at a time and finish it before the next item is presented
- To prevent choking, cut food into small pieces
- Put down utensils between bites and enjoy each bite as it is eaten
- Alternate sips of fluids with bites of food
- Ask the person if they are comfortable receiving reminders to slow down so that they can chew and swallow the food safely



## Low appetite or lack of interest

- Be physically active before meals and snacks
- Create a comfortable and pleasant place to eat and drink
- Have nutrient-dense foods and beverages high protein and calories that they enjoy
- Add flavor using herbs and spices
- Serve the food and beverages at a desirable and safe temperature
- Eat and drink with others



## Leaving before the meal is done

- Get involved in mealtime activities as much as possible
- Learn why they want to leave the table so that they can be assisted – for example, many conversations in a large group may be overwhelming
- Eat slowly and appreciate the food's appearance, smell, texture, and taste
- Offer finger foods that can be eaten while walking
- Pour beverages in a to-go mug or bottle that can be drunk while walking



## Becoming overwhelmed

- Set the table with just what is needed to avoid confusion and/or distraction
- Try to keep the environment as calm and relaxing as possible, such as minimizing noise, or offering them to eat with a smaller group