

# Why is Nutrition Important?



Factsheet for Persons Living with Dementia and Their Care Partners

In this factsheet, you will learn about:



Importance of Nutrition

Setting healthy eating goals

Pleasurable mealtime

## A healthy diet → a healthy brain!

A healthy diet supports all of your body, including your muscles, skeleton, and brain. The foods and fluids you eat and drink on a daily basis affect how your brain functions. Poor nutrition has been linked to progression of dementia and can lead to unwanted weight loss, putting an older adult at increased risk for other health problems. Unintentional weight loss can result in weakness and increased frailty. This may cause difficulties carrying out daily activities of life and a loss of independence. Care partners also need to stay healthy by keeping nutritious diets and exercising as they are the foundation of health.

### Key Ideas

- A healthy diet is important for all body functions including your brain!
- Follow a balanced diet that includes a variety of foods at every meal. Eat lean proteins, vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Try drinking small amounts throughout the day. Choose water most often.

**Healthy eating goals for persons living with dementia and their care partners**

## Why is Nutrition Important?

- Eat three meals a day. Include nutritious snacks.
  - Limit foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol.
  - Use less salt and limit high-sodium foods. Try seasoning foods with herbs and spices.
  - Eat fewer sugary foods and try to avoid soft drinks.
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- Meeting daily nutritional needs can be challenging, especially if your interest in food or your ability to eat changes.
  - If weight loss and poor appetite are concerns, you may also try a commercial meal replacement to meet your nutrient needs.
  - These can come in the form of milkshakes, energy bars, and puddings.
  - Ask your health care provider to refer you to a registered dietitian for individual nutrition counselling.

Making mealtimes a pleasurable experience is important. Meals provide an opportunity to socialize and receive emotional support. Use mealtimes as a way to stay connected and nurture your relationships. Taking part in making meals can bring meaning and a sense of accomplishment.

### My notes, reflections, and goals:

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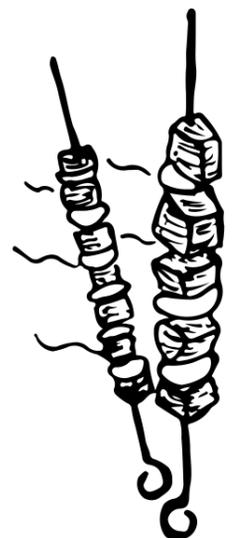
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# Dining Environment



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

The dining atmosphere affects how you feel about your meal and how much food you may eat. People living with dementia may become distracted by noise, confused by different plates or utensils, or feel uncomfortable in the dining space itself. Some people can be overstimulated by the environment, while others need cues to eat. Eating together, however, provides many benefits beyond the food, such as feelings of belonging and connection. Eating together on a daily basis is one way to promote well-being for all involved.

## Tips for making the mealtime experience more enjoyable:



Turn the television off to minimize distraction and background noise.



Minimize the noise during the meal.  
Soft music can be soothing.



Make sure chairs are comfortable and the table is the right height with enough leg room.



Plan and create meals together to stimulate interest and anticipation for eating.



Remove non-meal related objects from the table, including cell phones.



Keep the dining area well-lit so people can easily see their food.



Use pleasant aromas to stimulate interest in eating. For example, try baking bread before dinner!



Choose easy-to-hold cutlery. Provide colour and contrast with placemats and napkins.



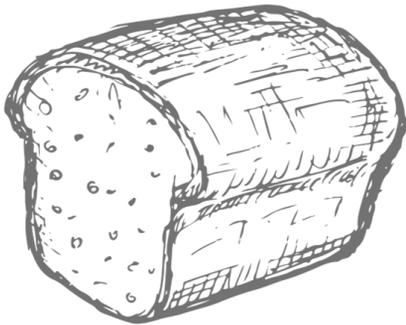
Place portions on dining plates to avoid distraction of serving bowls.



Have the meal ready on the table before calling dining mates.



Take time with eating. Enjoy the food and eating with someone else.



Making small changes to the eating environment can engage those with dementia in their mealtime experience. Some changes may work, but eventually lose their effectiveness. It is important to look for signs that further adaptation may be needed.

# Eating Non-Foods



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

- People living with dementia may not recognize that some things, like wrappers, napkins, or cups, shouldn't be eaten.
- It is common to confuse items for food, leading to choking, but this can be prevented.

## To help maintain dignity during mealtimes, try to:



Remove non-edibles from the dinner table, like wrappers or candles.



Season meals in the kitchen, so condiments will not be distracting.



Eat meals slowly, concentrating on the food.



Choose safe cutlery. Avoid flimsy utensils which can break when eating.



Put out the exact number of utensils to avoid distraction.  
Use regular china plates instead of disposable ones.



Place food items and appropriate cutlery within the reach.



Provide foods and utensils one at a time, then clear them out.



Make it as easy as possible to recognize utensils and condiments. Remove wrappings from food items.



Provide gentle positive, verbal reminders and encouragement.



Mimicry can support eating and drinking. Persons living with dementia may look to you for cues on how to eat.



Try to maintain the dignity of the person with dementia at all times.



Provide step-by-step eating prompts if needed. Remove items that cause difficulty or are no longer needed.



Keep the dining area simple to focus attention on the food provided. Remembering that eating non-edible items is not the choice of the person with dementia and making some simple changes to the eating environment can help everyone eat enjoyably.

# Dining Out



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

Meals outside the home provide a change of pace and a little 'get-away from the everyday'. Dining out, however, can pose some challenges.

Common problems can be:

- Choosing from the menu
- Paying the bill
- Not knowing how to eat certain dishes
- Staying seated for the entire meal
- Being distracted by noise or other patrons
- Finding it hard to enjoy the new environment

These changes can be overcome by planning ahead.

## To support a successful dining out event:

- Consider leaving young children at home if noise is an issue or have family gatherings at home instead.
- Go to restaurants during off times, like early evening, when places are quieter.
- Go to a favourite restaurant, where things are familiar.
- Enjoy fast food restaurants, coffee shops or finger-type foods if you are worried about spills or prefer to eat with your hands.
- Choose casual diners with outside seating that is fenced if safety is a concern.
- Ask for a ride if you are eating with others and transportation is difficult.
- Try visiting places that are in walking distance or close by.
- Use a taxi if you do not have a car for these outings.

- Call ahead and make a reservation. Tell the staff that one of the people coming has dementia. Tell them what you need, such as quiet corner. This can help the staff better serve you.
  - Discuss the event ahead of time. It may be forgotten, but it is important not to be surprised before leaving.
  - Use the washroom before leaving home. If possible, find a restaurant with easy washroom access.
  - Narrow down menu choices. Look for favourite ingredients.
  - Buffets may be easier for making choices.
  - Following group conversation can be a challenge. Try restating information to promote participation or asking a question to have information repeated.
  - Bill paying can be a challenge if the person with dementia is the one who usually pays. Debit machines can work well, and you can always provide a gentle reminder for the personal identification number.
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- Be respectful when providing assistance, whether checking the tip or indicating where to sign. Being criticized in a public place can be stressful for the person living with dementia.



As time progresses, eating out can become more difficult. Some advance planning can make the experience more enjoyable for all. Create opportunities to engage the person with dementia in the decision-making processes and establish a routine to promote comfort.

# Eating Too Much



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

Sometimes people living with dementia do not realize they have eaten, or do not feel full after eating a large meal. This can become a problem when people are gaining weight or constantly asking for more food.

## Tips to support someone who may be eating too much:

- Make a chart to check off meals. Offer gentle reminders.
- Eat slowly and talk about the food when eating.
- Suggest another activity, such as a walk or a puzzle.
- Provide gum, which may satisfy the desire to chew something.
- Eat five/six small meals a day, instead of three large ones.
- To stay full, try eating high fibre foods, drinking a glass of water before a meal, and sipping water between meals.
- Include a source of protein at each meal/snack.
- Keep low-calorie foods available and easily found in cupboards.
- Set out fruits, vegetable trays, and other healthy snacks in accessible places.

- Overeating is usually a short-term problem.
- Gaining a few extra pounds is not as great of a concern as weight loss; people living with dementia are at greater risk for losing weight as dementia progresses.
- Consider seeing your family doctor if other concerns arise.

# Finger Foods



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

- Eating can become a difficult task for some people living with dementia.
- Some foods, like pasta or peas, might become hard to eat because of the utensils and coordination required.
- To help a person with dementia have the most pleasant meal possible, you can adapt old favourite foods into finger foods that everyone will enjoy.
- These foods can keep mealtimes structured and help keep independence and dignity.

## Delicious and healthy finger foods:

- Muffins
- Chopped vegetables
- Flatbread or pizza
- Rolled-up whole wheat blueberry pancakes
- Casserole cooked in a muffin tin
- Finger sandwiches
- Cheese and crackers
- Baby boiled potatoes
- Turkey meatballs
- Home made chicken strips
- Sliced apple or melon
- Tuna, crab, shrimp cakes



Any food can be a finger food if it is contained, in small pieces, and at a temperature that can be safely handled (e.g., cooked vegetables, potato wedges).



Finger food can still be eye-pleasing. For example, tortilla pinwheels can be made with colourful fillings like red pepper spread and spinach.



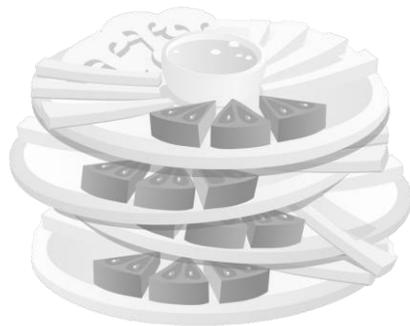
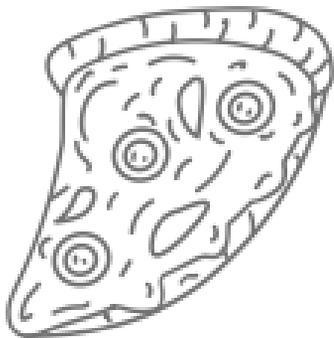
Choose naturally handheld foods like burgers, sloppy joes, and chicken legs, cheese pieces, pizza, cubes of cooked meat or cheese, etc.



Foods not traditionally hand-held can be converted for ease of eating. For example, yogurt can be frozen into a yogurt cube or pop.



Salad can be made into a lettuce/leaf wrap by putting the small pieces of salad inside a lettuce leaf and rolling.



Nutrients and enjoyment are more important than the way someone eats. Use your imagination to create handheld versions of old favourites.

# Food Jags



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

Sometimes people living with dementia will only eat certain foods. This is called a food jag, and it happens when someone has a strong craving and only wants to eat this food. Food jags can last for a day, a week, or longer. If someone is having a food jag, they may repeatedly ask for the same food, forget they ate that food recently, get upset, or hoard the food.

## To encourage more variety in meals, try to:

- Offer complementary foods. For example, if the food jag is peanut butter, offer it on an apple.
- Go along with the desired food. It becomes less interesting over time, especially when other foods are offered.
- Continue to offer a variety of foods at meals.
- Suggest activities to divert attention away from the food.
- Do not keep the food accessible, such as on the counter or easily seen in the fridge or cupboard. It is easier to forget about food when it is not seen.
- Adapt the food into different dishes. Boost nutrition by adding other ingredients to soups, salads, and casseroles.

If the food jag has continued for some time, variety in the foods eaten may be a concern. If further issues arise, try talking to your doctor for a referral to a registered dietitian.

# Healthy Eating



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

- Eating enough and the right type of foods that provide all necessary nutrients can support nutrition and overall health.
- To get the right amount of daily nutrients, there are a lot of things you can do.
- Remember that everyone is different, so what works for some may not work for others.
- For example, some individuals may have another health condition that requires limiting some foods or fluids.
- The following are general recommendations for healthy eating.

## Overview for healthy eating:

- Offer **high-protein foods** at every meal.
- These include meat, fish, and poultry, milk and milk products, soy beverages, nuts/nut butters, eggs, legumes (lentils, soy, dried beans, chickpeas).
- Offer and cook with **milk products** every day to provide calcium, vitamin D and B12.
- If weight loss is a problem, choose high-fat products, such as whole milk, ice cream, full-fat cheese, nut butters, nuts and seeds.
- Soy beverage is a good alternative to milk as it has a similar amount of protein and is typically fortified with the nutrients included in milk products.
- Compare labels for protein, calcium B12 and vitamin D content.

- Half of each meal should be **vegetables and fruits**. These can be raw, cooked, or juiced.
- Vegetables and fruits have lots of vitamins and minerals, and fibre will assist with constipation.
- Eat whole grain bread, pasta, rice, and cereals for fibre, nutrients, and energy.
- Eat fewer cookies and pastries.
- Drink enough **fluid**.
- You need about 5-8 cups of fluid a day, depending on how much you weigh.
- Water is ideal, but coffee, juice, milk, ice cream, jello, and soups all provide fluid.



- Meeting daily nutrition needs can be challenging.
- The above suggestions can be adapted for diverse cultures, but the basics are the same.
- Choose whole, low processed foods more often and enjoy variety.
- If you are concerned about getting enough vitamins, minerals and protein, a multivitamin or a commercial meal replacement (shakes, puddings, bars) may be an option.
- Speak to your healthcare provider or dietitian about supplements to meet your nutrient needs.
- Learning from a registered dietitian about how to get the most nutrition from food is a great way to make sure everyone is getting the nutrients they need.
- Check out Canada's Food Guide for further suggestions.

# Kitchen Safety



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

- The kitchen is the heart of the home.
- However, with various appliances and utensils, the kitchen can also be a dangerous place.
- Sometimes people can forget simple skills or steps in preparing food and cooking.
- Simple changes can promote safety.
- Making food for yourself and others is a meaningful activity.
- Modifying tasks can help everyone to participate for as long as they are interested in cooking.

## Some signs that extra help in the kitchen may be needed:



Trouble remembering the location of ingredients or putting things back in their wrong spot.



Forgetting how to put ingredients together to make a meal.



Forgetting to turn the stove, or other appliances, on or off.



Foods in the fridge or pantry are left unused or have spoiled.



Sharp utensils, such as knives, become difficult to handle

- Use a microwave oven for most cooking.
- Use cue cards to provide instructions for individual appliances. Leave these beside the appliance.
- Put stickers on the “off” position for the stove or other appliances that are a fire hazard. A safety switch can also be installed. You may want to consider these appliances as only for use when two people are cooking in the kitchen.
- Place all ingredients and utensils for favourite daily dishes, such as oatmeal, together in one place. This prevents searching cupboards for all that is needed.
- Mark cupboards with labels, such as “Cups and Mugs”. Keep commonly used items within reach.
- Use a marker to label best before dates on foods and label leftovers with dates.
- Use appliances with automatic shut-off buttons (e.g., kettle).
- Identify knives that are easier to handle to promote safety. Have these available for use.



These tips will help keep the kitchen a welcoming, comfortable and safe place in your home.

# Make Eating Easier



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

- People living with dementia may find eating a challenge.
- The habits we learned at mealtimes, such as how to use a knife and fork together, or spooning up soup, can become difficult to do.

## Ideas to support eating

- An occupational therapist can provide specific recommendations on utensils and dishware.
- If the person is entirely unable to hold a spoon with an adapted handle or bring it to his or her mouth with assistance, focus on offering finger or hand-held foods.
- Almost any food can be adapted to eating with the fingers. Many foods are naturally easy to eat by hand such as sandwiches, hamburgers, energy bars, cut up vegetables or fruit, and cheese. Think about making handheld foods like wraps to hold difficult to handle foods like scrambled eggs. Foods like puddings or yogurt can be frozen on a stick like a popsicle.
- Drinking from a cup is also a way to get your nutrition. Smoothies can be a nutritious and easy way to eat foods packed with nutrition.
- Find non-spill cups. Soup can also be offered in a cup.

- Use a wet cloth underneath plates to keep them from slipping during the meal.
- Brightly coloured dishware may make foods easier to see.
- Place utensils in the person's hand. Provide verbal cues.
- Eat slowly; show how food is meant to be eaten. Once started, the act of feeding oneself may become automatic.
- Make simple dishes, like stew, which is easy to eat and enjoy with a spoon.
- Find specially-designed utensils at your local healthcare outlet pharmacy or store. These can be easier to hold for those with weaker grip. Large handles and curved utensils can decrease spills.



- As time progresses, mealtimes can become increasingly difficult for people living with dementia.
- To ensure that everyone enjoys the meal, remember that it is important to feel good about being able to feed oneself and enjoy food.

# Swallowing Difficulties



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

- Some people living with dementia may begin to have challenges swallowing their food.
- This can make mealtime difficult and can lead to food avoidances and even choking.
- Poor nutrition can also result.
- Food choices may need to be changed.
- Other strategies may need to be considered to make swallowing easier and safer.

## Tips for making the mealtime experience more enjoyable:



Have a glass of water (if this is safe) before the meal to moisten the mouth and digestive tract.



Choose softer fruits and cut fruit up in smaller pieces for eating. Avoid peels.



Provide gentle reminders to take small bites, chew thoroughly, swallow, and eat slowly. Pause between bites.



Choose soft high protein foods such as stews, ground meat, Greek yogurt, eggs, cooked lentils and beans.



Cook vegetables until soft. Add butter/margarine, cheese, or cream sauces to moisten dry foods.

- Choose soft grains like cooked pasta, oatmeal, rice; grains that separate easily in the mouth, like couscous, quinoa or wild rice may be harder to handle.
- Often fluids like water, coffee, tea, and juices are hard to swallow. Fluids can be thickened to make them easier to swallow. For example, make smoothies or use gelatin. Crackers or bread crumbs can be used with soups. Commercial thickeners are also available at some pharmacies.
- Other foods that can be difficult to swallow are meats and bread. Try ground meat as an alternative and cut up whole grain bread into small squares, or moisten bread with fluid, such as soup or warm milk.
- Mixed consistencies (e.g. vegetable soup) can also be challenging. Blend soups to one consistency, remove fluid from canned fruit, make smoothies very smooth with no chunks of fruit.
- Chop, mash, or puree foods using a blender or a food processor. If they become too thin they can be thickened with potato flakes, cracker/bread crumbs, or a commercial thickener.
- Allow for longer mealtimes and slower eating.
- Learn First Aid in case choking happens. Classes may be offered at a local hospital or other organizations, like the Red Cross.

Early swallowing problems can be managed with these basic tips. However, as dementia progresses, swallowing can get progressively worse. \*Watch for the following signs that swallowing may be unsafe; coughing, gurgling, choking, gagging on food/drink; fear of eating/drinking; and/or feeling that food is “going down the wrong way”. A referral to a registered dietitian and/or a speech language pathologist (SLP) will be helpful to manage these challenges.

# Social Eating



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

- Eating together supports relationships and provides a sense of belonging and comfort.
- A big part of meals is the social interaction.
- This is often thought of as the conversation that occurs during the meal.
- However, mealtime social interactions can change with dementia, making it hard to stay connected.
- The following conversation starters, tips, and advice might be helpful.

## Consider these conversation starters:



Sit near a window and talk about the things you see outside the window.



Watch the news and discuss local and global events.  
Talk about shared memories.



Bring letters or emails from friends/family to read during the meal. Pictures can also be used.



Be mindful that some people living with dementia need to focus on one thing at a time. Eating is the priority at meals. Talk more before or after the meal.



Social interaction is also involves listening to others chat.  
Listening is participating.

## **Tips to help when eating a meal with others:**

- Order take-out or use pre-cooked food to decrease the stress of hosting.
- Plan for others to bring certain parts of the meal.
- Rather than having a whole meal, invite guests for dessert.
- Let others host. Ask if you can bring an appetizer.
- Go to a familiar restaurant.
- Watch for understanding, slow down, rephrase what was said, and provide background details.
- Bring the person with dementia into the conversation by restating a key point from the conversation for them to provide input on.

## **To help engage people in conversations, try to:**

- Eat in a quiet, peaceful setting where it is easy to hear the conversation.
- Small groups or one-on-one situations are best.



- Even when conversation is difficult, remember that being together is still social interaction.
- Often people living with dementia love to listen, this is participating in conversation as well.
- Just being with others and being acknowledged as part of the group is a way to stay connected.
- Make eye contact and use gentle physical touch to show you are thinking about and including the person living with dementia.

# Grocery Shopping



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

- From pushing a heavy shopping cart to reading the small print on labels, grocery shopping can be a very daunting task.
- For those with dementia, grocery shopping might present unique challenges.
- A few tips can ease the difficulty of a shopping trip.

## To support successful grocery shopping:

- Consider shopping online.
- Shop on senior discount days.
- Familiarity with the store will help to reduce confusion.
- Shop at a store where the staff are supportive and consistent.
- Go shopping after eating to minimize impulse purchases.
- Make a grocery list or a meal plan before grocery shopping.
- Pick the right time to shop. Mornings are normally less busy.





- Some grocery stores offer **shopping times designed to be low stimulation or sensory friendly** in order to provide a quiet atmosphere.
- During these times lights are lowered, overhead music is turned off, and the sounds of cash registers are muted.



- **Shop the perimeter of the store.**
- This is where most staples and foods you commonly run out of are located (bread products, dairy, vegetables, frozen foods, meat products).
- Only go into the aisles when you need a specific item.



- When shopping together, **split up the roles to make the visit much faster.**
- For example, one person can go to get two items in aisles while the other shops the perimeter for the main items.
- One can read the list while the other pushes the cart or finds the items.

- Remember that traditional grocery shopping by going in person to a store may not always be necessary.
- While it is important to respect one's independence and dignity, keep in mind that there are other options, such as phoning your local grocer to place orders and shopping online.

# Chewing Difficulties



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

Chewing difficulties often happen with age. Teeth may break and jaws may be weaker, or dentures may get loose. Chewing difficulties can result in food avoidance and even choking. Avoiding hard-to-eat foods can result in poor nutrition.

## To help with chewing difficulties, try to:



Take your time with chewing and eating. Do not rush meals. Chew carefully. Sit upright with the head forward.



Prepare foods so that they are easy to chew and swallow (e.g., cooking, shredding, chopping food to be finer).



See a dentist if ulcers or ill-fitting dentures are a problem.



Learn First Aid in case choking ever does happen.

Classes may be offered at a local hospital or other organizations, like the Red Cross.

Try these softer foods: scrambled eggs, flaked white fish, mashed potatoes, crustless bread dipped in soup.

Keep an eye out for chewing problems, such as prolonged chewing.

Seek help from a dentist or denturist. A registered dietitian can provide meal ideas to maintain nutrition.

# Staying at the Table



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

- People living with dementia may find it hard to stay seated for a full meal.
- This may pose a safety risk as well as result in less food intake.
- Eating enough and safely is more important than “proper” table manners.

## Tips to help someone remain at the table for their meal:



Try to find out why they want to leave the table. Do they need to use the washroom? Do they think they need to go somewhere? Reassure the person.



Reassure the person if they feel disoriented. For instance, “We’re staying here tonight. I will be here. We are safe. After dinner, we’ll get a good night’s rest.”



Praise the food. While eating with the person with dementia, talk about what you enjoy about the food. Positive reinforcement is helpful.



Carry out daily activities in a structured way. Consider the person’s likes/dislikes, abilities, interests, and strengths. Routines are helpful.



If possible, involve the person with dementia in preparing the meal so that they feel included.

- Close the door to the dining room or kitchen. Place a visual barrier like a curtain to mask the door during meals.
- Keep meals simple, with only one course.
- Schedule time for regular exercise to reduce restlessness, and allow sufficient time for: creative activities (e.g., painting, music); intellectual activities (e.g., reading, puzzles); emotional wellness (e.g., meditation, personal care); and social time.
- Ensure the person with dementia has enough strength and energy to chew/eat a full meal. If not, consider offering softer textures and/or more fluid-based meals. Smaller, more frequent meals may also work well.



- Wandering can be frustrating and stressful for care partners.
- There is no “one size fits all” solution, so it is critical to consider the situation and how it can be improved.
- Acceptance may be the best strategy.
- Making food available for nibbling when the person is hungry can be a way to maintain nutrition.
- Make sure foods are easy to carry and easy to eat and swallow to decrease risk of choking while moving about.

# Weight Loss



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

- For a variety of reasons, persons living with dementia can lose weight.
- Weight loss that is unintentional can result in undernutrition with consequent negative health effects such as loss of ability to be independent or increased infections.
- Finding the root cause of weight loss can be challenging.
- Does the person forget to eat or have a poor appetite?
- Do they have a hard time staying at the table, or do they have eating or swallowing challenges?
- Identify causes of poor food intake and focus on those issues.

## Consider these tips to promote weight maintenance:



Identify favourite foods and offer these foods more frequently.



Eat together. Eating is social, and when eating with others we often eat more.



Provide several small meals throughout the day, rather than a few large ones.



Try rinsing the mouth before eating to cleanse the palate and start each meal with a fresh taste in the mouth.

- Monitor body weight on a weekly basis. Take weights at the same time of day, wearing the same clothing.
- Consider using nutritional supplements or meal replacements (shakes, puddings) as they provide a concentrated amount of nutrition in a small volume.
- Add more flavour with herbs and spices. Taste changes are common, so stronger flavours may be appealing (e.g., sharp cheese, sour pickles). Our taste buds decrease with aging and may change more due to dementia.
- Start small and be realistic. One mouthful is better than none. Do not force the person living with dementia to eat or chastise them for not eating. Be aware that it can be very difficult to eat when appetite is low.
- Spend more time at the meal. Make meals a key activity in the day for social interaction as well as eating. Stay seated even if you are done to support the person who is slower to continue eating.
- Provide serving dishes on the table and stay at the table longer to encourage choosing more to eat.
- Emphasize foods high in calories and protein, such as higher fat dairy products or nut butters. For easy calories, add butter, margarine, creamy sauces, dressing, mayonnaise, etc.



- If you are concerned about weight loss, consider asking your doctor for a referral to a registered dietitian.
- A registered dietitian can help you understand the nutritional needs of the person with dementia and provide meal ideas.

# Staying Hydrated



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

- Bodies need water for regulating temperature, maintaining blood pressure, and eliminating waste.
- Mild dehydration can cause tiredness, constipation, headaches, and confusion.
- Risk of dehydration increases as a person gets older.
- For some people, it may be difficult to remember to drink enough fluid, and thirst cannot be relied on to cue drinking.

## Tips to stay hydrated:



Make frequent offers of fluid. Leave out jugs of water in accessible places.



Try one-way straws, easy-to-open bottles, or non-spill cups.



Drink together. Drinking and eating are social. Use mimicry to stimulate drinking.



Identify preferred drinks and drinking containers. Consider which cups/glasses are easier to handle and drink from. An easy to use and carry water bottle is another option.



High fluid foods can also support hydration, especially for persons with swallowing problems.



Set reminders or track drinking with a drink journal.

- Be innovative and think about getting fluids in non-traditional ways (e.g., jelly, popsicles, ice cream, soup, etc.).
- Try using a water bottle that has the volume marked on the side. Set a goal for increasing intake each day or week.
- Drinks that are too cold may be uncomfortable to drink. Try a glass that is just cooler than room temperature. Some people prefer warm water.
- Look out for warning signs of dehydration, such as dry eyes or mouth, trouble swallowing, and weight loss. Darker, stronger-smelling urine and infrequent urination are indications that not enough fluids are being consumed.

### **High-water foods:**

- Soups, broths
- Celery, tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce
- Apples, oranges, grapes, berries, melons, peaches
- Jelly, gelatin desserts
- Ice cream, yogurt, cottage cheese, popsicles



Drinking is often a habit. Don't rely on thirst to ensure enough fluids are consumed. Even if it's just a couple sips at a time, trying new and inventive strategies (e.g., adding cucumber and lemon slices to water or serving herbal tea, or having non-alcoholic happy hour) will pay off.

# How You Can Help



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

- There are several ways that families and friends can help people living with dementia and their care partners eat healthfully, such as doing the grocery shopping or phoning to remind them to eat or show interest in eating.
- Here are some examples of how friends, family and neighbours can help.

## Tips to provide support:



Ben hasn't done much cooking, but Richard likes to cook. Richard suggests they make soup together. Next week, Ben makes the soup again by himself.



Karen's parents live in a home. They have a small kitchenette. Karen comes once a week and makes a home-cooked meal for them.



Flora has a hard time choosing from the menu. Her friends know that she likes seafood and point out a few items on the menu that she would enjoy.



It's getting hard for Mary to host a meal for others, but she likes to cook and be the hostess. Her daughters bring main dishes when their families come to visit, and she makes the salad.



Cindy makes her aunt homemade meals that can be reheated. She cooks it at her aunt's house so they can enjoy the tasty smells from the kitchen.



Heidi has difficulty finding her way back to the table in a restaurant after using the washroom. Her friend goes with her to the washroom when they eat out.



Jane likes to go out with her girlfriends but finds it hard to leave her husband Sam home alone. The husband of her friend has supper with Sam while their wives go out.



Diane needs some assistance with grocery shopping. Her friend, Anna, takes her to the store and encourages her to shop alone, but keeps an eye on her and asks if she needs help.



Jack helps his mother Helen organize her kitchen. They put commonly-used items within reach and write instructions on cue cards for the appliances.



- Food and eating are key daily activities that provide not only nutrition but also a sense of meaning and dignity from making one's own food, to social opportunities with others.
- Consider how you can use food and meals as a way to stay connected and support those living with dementia.

# Optimistic Outlook



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

A positive outlook can help coping with various difficulties

**Face the challenge**

“I think we take our challenges. We get lemons and we make lemonade.”

**Accept**

“These things happen to you and I think you just have to accept them.”

**Be realistic**

“I sort of say to myself, I have Alzheimer’s. I’m going to forget words.”

**Be thankful**

“He’s appreciative, and I tell him how much I value that. It makes it easier.”

**Let it go**

“If I don’t think it’s an issue, and it’s not affecting anything, I just let it go.”

**Have a sense of humour**

“Most of the things that happen now, we laugh about.”

**View change as part of dementia**

“Sometimes, I just have to sit back and say... it’s part of the disease.”

**Change expectations**

“If the ironing doesn’t get done, it doesn’t get done... I’m more relaxed.”

**Focus on abilities**

“As long as I can do it – I’ll do it, and I’ll be there for others to help others too.”

**Focus on basics**

“I’m happy to be here, happy to be alive. Whatever happens, I go with it.”

**Take one day at a time**

“Well you know me; I take it as it comes.”

# Pureed Foods



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

- Sometimes people living with dementia need pureed foods for chewing and swallowing difficulties.
- Pureed foods should hold shape when scooped without running into other foods and have a smooth consistency, like pudding.
- Pureed foods shouldn't be sticky, pourable, or have liquid separation.
- Instead, they should be edible with a fork (doesn't slip through prongs) and can be piped, molded, or layered.
- Often thickeners are needed to get pureed food to this consistency.

## Choosing the right thickener is important. Try:

- **Modified corn starch:** excellent thickening ability, easy to find
- **Skim milk powder:** great source of protein, calcium, and vitamin D; good for dishes that are creamy, such as casseroles or pasta sauce
- **Infant-based rice cereal:** great source of iron, calcium, B-vitamins; cost-effective and easy to find
- **Peahull fibre:** great source of fibre, protein, and micronutrients; can improve bowel function
- **Flax flour:** great source of fibre, protein, and fatty acids; nutty flavour
- **Gelatin:** can be added to a variety of recipes to thicken fluids
- **Mashed potato flakes:** adds potato flavour to foods while absorbing fluid

**Pureed foods should be identifiable. Add garnishes on top of pureed foods:**

- Jam on pureed bread
- Ketchup and mustard on pureed hot dogs/burgers
- Gravy on pureed meats and potatoes
- Pureed fruit on desserts



**Pureed Chicken, Apple, and Spinach**

**Ingredients**

- 2 apples, peeled and chopped
- 2 carrots, sliced
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 6 ounces skinless, boneless chicken breast
- 1 1/4 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 3 cups spinach

**Instructions**

1. Combine all ingredients in a large saucepan except spinach. Boil.
2. Reduce heat and simmer until chicken is tender (15 minutes).
3. Stir in spinach. Cook until wilted (3 minutes).
4. Puree mixture until smooth.
5. Refrigerate in an airtight container.

- When pureeing, use as little fluid as possible.
- Note that pureed foods end up with a smaller volume.
- Make sure pureed foods have sufficient protein.
- Boost the healthfulness of pureed foods with nutrient-dense ingredients and fluids (e.g. milk or vegetable broth instead of water).

# Eating Challenges



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

These supportive strategies can enhance mealtimes for people living with dementia as their abilities change.

**Recognition**  
(e.g., eating soup with a knife)

- Provide food-specific cutlery
- Show foods rather than their packets (e.g., sugar, jam)
- Provide foods/beverages one at a time

**Purposeful movement**  
(e.g., starting to eat)

- Inviting the person living with dementia to meals
- Placing utensils in their hand to cue them to eat
- Provide options that will help them eat with their fingers if it's easier for them to manage

**Expressing choices**  
(e.g., no verbal response to questions)

- Show/describe food options, then check facial expressions for interest in eating that food
- Try offering dessert first, or give them space and offer again in ten minutes

**Individuality**  
(e.g., refusing a specific meal)

- Learn and respect routines (e.g., clearing their own dishes, prayer before a meal, or coffee at the beginning)
- Be flexible and allow eating in front of the TV or with a book

### **Changes to perception**

(e.g., reaching for someone else's cup because they see it more easily)

- If the person often starts eating hot foods without waiting or trying it first, ensure meals are cooled to a safe temperature for eating right away before serving
- Place meals where they see best, as some may lose parts of their visual field

### **Changes to attention**

(e.g., watching and listening to others instead of eating)

- Minimize noise in the dining room
- Set up the person's meal in a quieter location
- Redirect them back to the table if they become distracted
- Offer finger foods that can be eaten while walking

### **Socializing**

(e.g., frustration at not being able to understand what someone has said or participate in conversation)

- Refer to other people at the table by name
- Talk about the meal itself, how the foods look, smell, and taste
- Take a moment to sit down with the person and chat
- Ask them if they used to enjoy cooking
- If they liked cooking, ask them what their favourite recipes were

**Meaningful, purposeful activity**  
(e.g., disinterest in the meal)

- Create rituals that involve the person (e.g., setting the table)
- Involve in planning/choosing menu items and participate in food preparation (e.g., pouring juice, washing vegetables)
- Ask about specific likes and dislikes

# Appetite



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

- Appetite is important to promote eating enough to maintain a healthy body weight and to get enough of essential nutrients to maintain health.
- Poor appetite can be worrisome and if it goes on for awhile, this should be checked out with a physician.
- There may be a medical reason for poor appetite.
- When appetite comes and goes, the following strategies may help.

## Change the setting:

- Invite additional family members to the meal.
- Provide some distraction if safe to do so. For example, eat in front of the TV or while reading a book or listening to the radio. It can be easier to take in food when the focus is off eating.
- Create a relaxed environment. This may be soft music during the meal, watching the birds, or ensuring a comfortable temperature.

## Prepare an appetizing meal:

- Know specific tastes and preferences.
- Make a meal that will be mutually enjoyable.
- Create visual appeal with colour and shapes. Portion out the food before sitting at the table. Use small bowls/plates and food portions. Large amounts of food can be intimidating.



Avoid nagging and criticism; use “soft, gentle” verbal reminders.



Start to eat, this can act as a cue to others to eat. We eat more when we eat with others.



Try providing some physical assistance to get started with eating, such as giving a spoon.



If weight loss is an issue, focus on high calorie, high protein foods and drinks.



Fluids may work best to boost calories, it can be easier to drink calories than eat them.



- There are many nutritious, high-protein/calorie foods that are easy to eat.
- Try stocking your refrigerator and pantry with pudding, ice cream, yogurt, avocado, nut butter, bananas, hummus, whole eggs, and olive oil.
- Supplements may also be helpful for those who have a hard time meeting nutritional requirements.

# Cooking Together



Factsheet for People Living with Dementia and their Care Partners

- Preparing meals is a meaningful family activity and an important role.
- Good meals nourish you and your family, not only in nutrients but also in developing and maintaining relationships.
- Getting and keeping everyone involved is a way to build connections and share the load.
- Persons living with dementia may find preparing meals a meaningful role and should be invited to participate for as long as it is safe to do so.
- However, this can be stressful.
- The following tips will keep everyone safe and mealtimes an enjoyable experience.

## Simplify meals to focus on enjoy eating together:

- Prepare large amounts of food when you have time and energy. Freeze it for later use.
- Buy some convenience foods/ingredients from bulk stores (e.g., shredded cheese).
- Use Meals-On-Wheels or another meal delivery service.
- Choose healthier take-out options or frozen prepared meals.
- Look for one-pot recipes or mixed dishes that contain all the nutrition you need.
- When entertaining, accept offers to bring food items, limit the guest list, and plan to serve simple dishes. Buy pre-made foods or consider a caterer for special events.



Have interdependent roles; someone can wash vegetables while the other cuts them.



Identify tasks that can be done without supervision, such as making breakfast, setting the table.



Assist with complex recipes; check off steps that have been completed. Use a ruler to identify recipe steps.



Use cooking as an activity that can be done with support staff working with persons living with dementia.



Use appliances with easy-to-follow instructions or symbols.

### Support autonomy:

- Ask opinions for decisions such as meal timing, recipes, etc.
- Provide options and choice for how participation in meal preparation will happen.
- Ask for input and participation for cooking a meal if you are not the expert.

### Take a sensitive approach to making suggestions

- Phrase questions in a way that do not push your own needs.
- Be aware that how you say things will affect the person's self-esteem and independence.
- Acknowledge efforts to participate in meal preparation.
- Do not correct mistakes with the other person around.
- Look for opportunities to provide praise.