

EATING



Providing regular nutritious meals can become a challenge for people with dementia. As a person with dementia progresses, it can affect their eating habits. This fact sheet will provide practical strategies for caregivers who are having a difficult time with feeding their person with dementia.

CAUSES:

- Loss of appetite
- Illness such as depression, constipation, diabetes, stomach problems, urinary infection, and pneumonia, etc.)
- Dry mouth
- Poor lighting
- Sensory overload
- Boredom
- Food looks or smells unappetizing
- Difficulty holding silverware
- Task is too complicated
- Lack of physical activity will decrease appetite.
- Feeling rushed
- Caregivers impatience is being felt
- Fear and anxiety
- Forgets to stop and eat
- Sensation of hunger no longer registers in brain
- Problems with teeth, mouth, gums or dentures
- Side effect of medication
- Change in taste due to medication

SOLUTIONS:

- Keep mealtime simple and calm
- Turn off the TV and radio
- Reduce distractions at the table by removing unneeded items off the table
- Create adequate lighting
- Serve one item at a time
- Have vision check
- Relax and reassure the person while eating
- Have healthy snacks available with easy access
- Use solid-colored plates on a contrasting place mat
- Remind them to chew and swallow
- Have them participate in making the food

- Make sure food is accessible and at a comfortable reach
- Don't hurry, be patient give plenty of time to eat
- Try finger foods
- If swallowing is hard serve softer foods
- Allow the person to eat when hungry
- Leave small snacks on the table or near them
- Offer shakes
- Prepare foods how they remember them
- Try 5-6 smaller meals per day
- Ask your doctor about medication side effects
- Consult your dentist about dry mouth, gum disease, and denture problems
- Moisten food with gravies and sauces
- Cut food up into small pieces
- Try the hand over hand eating technique using the person's dominate side
- Demonstrate eating so they can copy you

CONSIDER:

- Remove any spoiled food from the house
- Watch foods temperatures
- Many people with dementia do not receive adequate amounts of fluids
- Many eating problems are temporary and will change as the persons abilities change
- Consult a doctor if choking problems develop