**FEEDING AND NUTRITION (FOR DEMENTIA)**

*By Family Caregiver Alliance*

* Avoid food fights. Make mealtime as pleasant as possible. Encourage someone to eat, but don’t demand, cajole, or threaten.
* Someone with dementia may not know what he/she wants to eat. If giving choices, give only two things to choose between. Even if a choice is made, the person may not want it when it is presented. Don’t take it personally. If you know his/her favorite foods, have them available for back up. Favorite foods might change.
* People often crave sweet things, so make them available, in limited quantities, unless medically not recommended, e.g. diabetes. Fruit can often fulfill this need. We all lose taste buds as we age, so food doesn’t taste the same. For some people, bland food is fine, and for others, we need to spice it up.
* People will often not eat a large meal or the traditional three meals a day. Try offering smaller, more frequent meals. Or offer nutritional supplements between meals. Always have water or other liquids available and offer them often, so the person doesn’t get dehydrated.
* Use small plates, as large ones can be overwhelming. Use color contrast of plate and food for the person to more easily distinguish the food. Turn the plate if the person has eaten all the food on one side. Chop food into small pieces to make it easier to chew. For some people, serving one food at a time might be less overwhelming.
* If coordination and independence are an issue, offer finger foods—sandwiches, cut up fruits and vegetables, cheese cubes, fish sticks, chicken nuggets, etc.
* If a person is having trouble swallowing, use a straw when offering liquids. Or use a thickening agent and pureed foods rather than thin liquids. Get a referral to a speech therapist to assess the problem, and learn ways to cue someone to swallow. Learn the Heimlich maneuver.
* If someone is reluctant to eat, he/she may be having a chewing problem ranging from dentures that don’t fit correctly to oral pain or other dental problems. Try softer foods, such as applesauce, cottage cheese, yogurt, eggs, and puddings.
* Sit with the person, if possible, while eating, to create an atmosphere of friendliness. People often eat very slowly, and so sitting with the care receiver during the entire meal time might be burdensome. However if you sit at the beginning of the meal, it will be a way to model eating for the person. Decrease distractions such as TV and radio. Limit utensils to the one that is needed at a given time in the meal. Serve soup in a cup so it can be drunk rather than spooned out.
* If your loved one needs to be fed, offer one food item at a time. Make sure he/she has swallowed before offering the next bite. Demonstrate and cue eating behavior.
* Serve food at the right temperature to eat right now. Waiting for food to cool might be a deterrent to eating or a burn hazard.
* People with memory problems may not remember to eat or may ask again for a meal, having forgotten they already ate. Keep healthy snacks available, rather than telling them that they just ate.

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**Source URL:** https://www.caregiver.org/feeding-and-nutrition-dementia