



Eating well with dementia.

People who live with dementia often face challenges around food and eating. This can include loss of appetite and difficulties preparing or eating food. This fact sheet includes ideas to support people living with dementia and those who care for them.

Eating well with dementia

People living with dementia are at risk of malnutrition for reasons including:

- forgetting to eat or becoming confused about mealtimes
- swallowing difficulties
- changes in taste and smell
- loss of appetite, nausea, or dry mouth
- feeling agitated or restless at mealtimes.

Malnutrition is not a normal part of ageing or dementia. Malnutrition is preventable and should not be overlooked. Eating enough food is important to help maintain quality of life.

Enjoyable mealtimes

Eating is more enjoyable when we can reduce stress. Our top tips to help are:

- plan to eat with others whenever possible (if this is not too distracting)
- set up a relaxed eating space. Turn off the radio and TV, play background music if you enjoy it
- eat meals and snacks regularly. Eat your largest meal when you feel most alert
- do not rush meals. Allow plenty of time to eat
- if you feel overwhelmed by a plate of food, try serving smaller portions or only put one food out at a time
- colourful plates can help food stand out. Avoid busy patterns or extra items on tables and plates
- you might find it helpful to have someone prompt you to eat during the meal (for example, by placing cutlery in your hands)



- reduce risk of burns by making sure food is not too hot
- an alarm clock or phone call could be used to remind you to eat meals and snacks.

Choose enjoyable food options

You are more likely to eat enough when you like the food available. Try to:

- use familiar foods - cook and present them in familiar ways
- choose bright, colourful food that looks and smells good
- prepare foods that are easy to eat with your hands (see ideas below)
- try some new dishes if usual favourites are not being enjoyed - likes and dislikes may change
- choose sweet foods from the five food groups (like dairy foods and fruit) if sweet foods are a favourite.

If cooking is difficult

If preparing meals has become challenging, here are some ideas to try.

- Buy pre-prepared meals from the supermarket. Choose meals high in protein.
- Ask a support person (a family member or friend) to help prepare larger quantities of food and freeze individual portions.
- Arrange home delivered meals from meal services or home delivery from a favourite restaurant.
- Access home support services to help with meal preparation, serving and cleaning.
- Choose a comfortable, familiar venue when eating out.
- Keep snacks that are easy to eat and don't need to be refrigerated on hand. These foods can be left out where they can be easily seen.

If eating is difficult

Eating food can become challenging for people living with dementia. These ideas might help.

- Soft, moist foods may be easier to eat.
- Add minced meat, eggs or legumes in casseroles and stews.
- Be careful of sticky, dry or crunchy foods as they may cause choking.
- Some people may have trouble eating two textures in one meal. An assessment by a speech pathologist may be needed.
- Try adapted cups and lightweight cutlery. Ask your community nurse or occupational therapist for help.

Healthy Ageing Tasmania

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- Put a non-slip placement under the plate.
- Cut up meat and hard vegetables or try finger foods.
- Include nourishing drinks such as milkshakes in between meals if you don't eat as much as you used to at mealtimes.

If overeating is a problem

Sometimes, people with dementia can overeat. This can happen when they forget that they have eaten. These tips may help.

- Have healthy, low energy snacks within easy reach, for example fruit or pieces of cooked vegetables.
- Spread meals and snacks out over the day.
- Provide low energy fluids such as water or soup at the beginning of a meal.
- Try outings and activities as a distraction from food.

Try finger foods

Finger foods can be a great option as they are easily eaten without cutlery. This means that someone living with dementia can eat with less assistance and maintain more of their independence. See the table below for finger food ideas.



| Meal | Finger food ideas |
|------------------|--|
| Breakfast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toast fingers with a spread or dip (for example, peanut butter or hummus). • Crumpets or small rolls. • Pikelets, pancakes, scones or banana bread. • Hardboiled eggs or omelette cut into strips. |
| Lunch | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandwiches with fillings that will not fall out. Try mixing fillings with mayonnaise, soft cheese or other spreads to help them stick to the bread. • Chunky potato wedges, potato fritters or whole baby potatoes. • Pieces of cooked, steamed or baked vegetables such as, sweet potato, carrot, broccoli or cauliflower. • Pikelets or patties made with grated or cooked vegetables. |
| Dinner | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strips of meat or chicken served with dipping sauces. • Meatballs or patties. • Hardboiled eggs. • Slices of quiche or frittata. • Small tortilla cups filled with taco meat, cheese, and topping. • Mini soft tacos with your favourite fillings. • Mini pizza slices. • Savoury toast cut into fingers. • Rice paper rolls or spring rolls. |
| Snack | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh fruit such as melons, kiwi fruit or banana cut into finger sized pieces. • Small fruit such as strawberries or apricots cut in half. • Small fruit-based muffins, pikelets or pancakes made with soft fruit such as berries or banana. • Savoury scones. • Frozen yoghurt in a cone. • Cheese slices or cubes. • Mini cheesecake or tarts. • Cheese or yoghurt-based dips with crackers, toast fingers or soft vegetables sticks. |
| Dessert | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mini cupcakes or muffins. • Chocolate-covered strawberries. • Bite-sized brownies. • Mini fruit tarts or tartlets. |

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