

Eating Tips for Dementia Residents

Reduce noise in the dining environment

It can be difficult and upsetting for someone with dementia to concentrate on the task of eating if there is a lot of noise or activity going on in the environment.

Suggestions: *Try to ensure that meals are provided in settings that are quiet, clean, and simple in terms of their decor. A quiet, calm atmosphere will help ensure that the resident can enjoy the meal at his/her own pace rather than feel rushed.*

Provide simple meal choices

In addition to noise in the environment, having too many food options to choose from can also frustrate and overwhelm individuals with dementia.

Suggestions: *Plate small portions, perhaps no more than one or two options on the same plate at once.*

Show them how

Often times, the resident may just be missing that one step or cue to continue on with the meal.

Suggestions: *Get his / her attention and demonstrate what you would like him / her to do, such as using a fork and knife to cut a piece of meat or spreading jam on a piece of toast. By resisting the urge to feed the resident, you respect his / her individuality and give him or her the chance to do it independently.*

Make eating easier

As dementia progresses, it becomes difficult to use utensils, such as forks, knives, and spoons.

Suggestions: *Cut up food into smaller bite-sized pieces or serve finger foods. Also, use straws and cups with lids so that he / she can more easily drink beverages. Serving meals in bowls rather than on plates can also facilitate eating, as the sides can make it easier to pick up food.*

Keep them hydrated

Older individuals with dementia are less able to recognize they are thirsty. Signs of dehydration include dry, cottony mouth, sticky saliva, and dark urination.

Suggestions: *Make sure the resident does not become dehydrated by offering him / her fluids, such as water, milk, or juice, several times throughout the day and not just at meals. Also, offer foods that are known to have water content that is high. Examples include watermelon, cantaloupe, cucumbers, lettuce, soups, yogurt, and cottage cheese.*

During late stage dementia, there will come a time when the resident must be manually fed. If you are doing the feeding, try alternating a solid food with a sip of a liquid. Other tips for feeding in late stage dementia include the following:

- Do not rush eating. Allow at least an hour for a meal.
- Keep the person upright and comfortable while eating, as well as for 30 minutes afterwards.
- Serve soft foods. Bite-sized foods and eventually mashed or pureed foods may be needed.
- Use caution with watery liquids. Thicken liquids with approved thickeners. Once swallowing becomes a problem in dementia, the person is more likely to choke on thin liquids.
- Monitor bowel movements - a natural laxative, such as prunes or bran can be added to the diet.
- Get a registered dietitian/medical evaluation for weight loss.