



HELPING CARERS COPE

DEMENTIA HELP



DEMENTIA AND NUTRITION

*AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE
FOR CARERS*



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A note from the Editor

When it comes to good health, eating a balanced diet is crucial. However, for a person with dementia, this can be difficult. My mum would have been happy to exist on chocolate and cakes. It was only when she had Meals On Wheels that she began to eat a balanced diet and her health improved. She had

a lot of out of date foods in the fridge, which caused tummy troubles. There are various reasons why a person with dementia may struggle to eat a healthy, balanced diet - from a loss of appetite to forgetting how to use cutlery. However, there are ways you can help. This guide can help you to identify the possible causes behind any eating

difficulties that may arise, and explains how to resolve them.

Christina Neal
Founder
dementiahelpuk.com



Christina and her mum Hazel



Loss of appetite

It's a sad fact that people with dementia have problems with eating and drinking. One of these can be a loss of appetite. Here are some other causes...

DEPRESSION

A loss of appetite is a sign of depression. If you suspect your loved one is depressed, speak to their GP, who may prescribe medication.

COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

Your loved one may no longer be able to

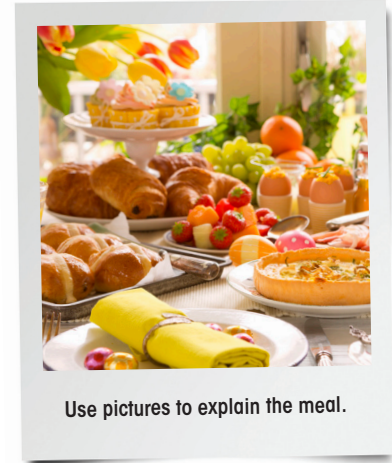
communicate that they are hungry, that they don't like the food they have been given, or that the food is too hot or cold for them. Offer a simple choice of foods or use pictures to explain meals.

TIREDNESS

If a person is tired, they may give up on a meal halfway through. Serve meals and snacks when they are most alert.

PAIN

Could the person be refusing food



Use pictures to explain the meal.

because they are having dental pain? Maintaining good oral health is key.

CONSTIPATION

Constipation can make someone feel bloated, meaning their appetite dwindles. Encourage the person to drink plenty of water and speak to their GP if this persists.

LACK OF EXERCISE

If the person has a sedentary lifestyle, it could be that they are not using enough energy to become hungry. Encourage them to go on some gentle walks.

'A person with dementia may look at an item of food and no longer recognise it'





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'If the person refuses to eat, don't nag them. Try later'



DISTRACTIONS

If your loved one has gone off food, there could be too many distractions for them, such as the TV or radio, or noise from others. They may only be able to concentrate on one thing at a time and, once distracted, might forget there is food in front of them. Keep mealtimes calm.



Tips to encourage eating

When trying to encourage your loved one to eat, take into account their personal food preferences.

- ✔ Try smaller portions so they are not overwhelmed.
- ✔ If they are struggling to chew, try soups, smoothies, milkshakes or softer foods, such as scrambled eggs.
- ✔ Taste buds may

diminish, so foods might need to be stronger or sweeter than usual.

- ✔ Stay relaxed. If the person refuses to eat, don't nag them. Just try again later.
- ✔ Let them eat what they fancy, even if it's only dessert.
- ✔ If you can, involve them in food prep.
- ✔ Cut up food for them if they cannot manage it.



SIGHT PROBLEMS

Dementia can affect a person's sight. Although we see with our eyes, our brain has to process what we see. With food, this can cause problems. A person may no longer recognise food or be trying to cut up the pattern on their plate. If they seem unsure as to what they should be eating, offer gentle guidance.



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Food storage

If your loved one lives alone, they may no longer be able to store foods correctly. They may not put cheese, meat or milk in the fridge or know that certain foods need to be in the freezer. They may no longer be able to decipher use-by dates on food.

When you visit, check the contents of their cupboards, fridge and freezer

and throw away anything out of date. You could try leaving reminder notes on the fridge or cupboard doors, to help them store foods correctly. You could enlist extra help. If Meals On Wheels operates in their area, this is a great way for them to receive hot meals daily. Or perhaps a home care agency could help.



OVEREATING

A person with dementia may overeat because they have forgotten they have just eaten or are feeling bored.

They may also experience an increase in sweet cravings, which could be due to diminishing taste buds. Try to keep the person busy to combat boredom and serve smaller portions.

'When visiting your loved one, check the contents of their cupboards, fridge and freezer'





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Avoiding choking

In the later stages of dementia, a person can have problems chewing or swallowing. Signs include repeated coughing and throat clearing, chest infections and grimacing when swallowing. Make sure the person is in an upright position when eating, and offer moist foods that are easy to chew and swallow. Speak to the person's GP for advice.

'A person who is dehydrated can develop confusion, headaches, constipation or a urinary tract infection'



DEHYDRATION

A person with dementia might be unable to recognise thirst, or no longer say they're thirsty. They might simply forget to drink.



Dehydration can cause confusion, headaches, constipation or a urinary tract infection.

Here's some tips...

- ✔ Leave a jug of water by their bed or next to their chair, so they don't have to get up when they want a drink.
- ✔ Give drinks in easy-to-hold beakers. Add lemon, lime or orange slices, to make water more appealing.
- ✔ Offer foods with a high water content such as fruits (like melon).

