

Supporting Nutrition in Dementia

This leaflet provides information about nutrition and dementia. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your patient's care.

- **There is no perfect diet for dementia, only for the individual and their goals.**
- **Aim for a healthy and varied diet, including all food groups – starchy foods, proteins (meats, eggs, lentils, beans and pulses), healthy fats, dairy and plenty of fruits and vegetables.**
- **Unintentional weight loss due to eating challenges can be distressing. If this happens, speak to a GP and/or dietitian, and encourage high calorie and high protein foods.**

Common Challenges

Appetite and food preparation

- Low appetite or changes in their food preferences
- Reduced sense of smell
- Difficulty connecting hunger or thirst with eating and drinking and / or difficulty communicating hunger or thirst
- Losing sense of time, leading to challenges remembering when they last ate or when it is a mealtime
- Reduced ability to prepare food and manage food-related domestics, e.g. use by dates, shopping, choosing meals, cooking etc.

Mealtime process

- Difficulty recognising foods and utensils, using utensils, chewing and swallowing
- Holding food in the mouth
- Reduced attention span at mealtimes, increased distractibility
- Needing longer to finish meals
- Overwhelmed by lots of food or lots of utensils
- Needing help to eat.

Supportive Strategies

A low appetite is often the biggest challenge. It is important to address any other causes of this, e.g. loose dentures, visual impairment, reduced physical activity and medications or physical difficulty self-feeding.

Environment

Simple Tables

Plain tablecloths and mats, only the cutlery needed, clear of clutter such as tissues or empty packaging.

High Contrast

Plain coloured plates that contrast with the table / mat. Bright yellow plates are commonly used in hospitals for patients with dementia.

Rethink Cutlery

Special cutlery can help patients use utensils and help with co-ordination. Spoons, hands and straws are helpful tools too.

Keep Food and Drinks Easily Accessible and Visible

This will help prompt them to eat. Ensure meals, drinks and snacks are in arms reach.

Dedicated Environment and Regular Mealtimes

Remind them of the time and that it is time to eat. They may need reminding how long it's been since they last ate. Whiteboards and tick charts can be helpful prompts.

Minimise Distractions

In hospital, try closing the curtains, mute beeping machinery if safe to do so or turn off the TV. If they would like some background noise, try calm and familiar music.

Eat Together

Seeing others eat can remind them it is time to eat.

Encourage Physical Activity

This can help to stimulate appetite.

Dementia-Friendly Mealtimes: Further Help

[Alzheimer's Society \(alzheimers.org.uk\)](http://alzheimers.org.uk)

[Home - Dementia UK](#)

Food and Feeding

Little and Often

Offer 5-6 small meals a day and / or regular snacks. This is particularly helpful when large portions are overwhelming or if they have a low appetite.

Energy Dense

Try adding butter, cream, oil, cheese and sauces to provide additional calories.

Try Something New

Taste preferences can change, sometimes overnight. Keep an open mind and offer new tastes and textures.

Allow Plenty of Time

For various reasons people with dementia can take longer to eat, up to 45-60 minutes when they require a lot of assistance.

Nourishing Drinks

Milk, hot chocolate, Meritene, Complan, Ovaltine or Horlicks help provide calories and protein. Tea, coffee and juices are important too. Fluids help avoid dehydration and constipation. Try adding 4 tbsp of dried milk powder to milk to make it higher in calories and protein.

Finger Foods

Reduce the need for utensils and it is easier to leave some for later. It can also promote variety and independence.

Colourful Foods

These enhance contrast on the plate and makes food more visually appealing.

One-at-a-time

Changing tastes and textures rapidly can become confusing.

Favourite and Familiar

Encourage family to bring in familiar or favourite foods from home if they are in hospital or in a new environment and encourage favourite foods if they are losing weight.

Offer snacks or meals after mobilising

Physical activity helps stimulate appetite.

Food and Finger Food Ideas

Sometimes, if you or your loved one are losing lots of weight or struggling to eat much, it is acceptable to have more high calorie foods that are typically thought of as 'unhealthy'. It is very important not to lose weight too rapidly as this can negatively affect health, risking muscle loss and affecting mobility and independence.

Breads and cereals

Sandwiches - Cut into quarters / bite size pieces – consider removing crusts to make softer

Quarters of toast / bread and butter

Add jam / honey / marmite for extra flavour / sweetness and calories

Cheese, butter and crackers - halve and slice to make more bite size. Extra butter adds moisture

Chapattis, pitta bread, bread sticks

Buttered toast with jam or cheese cut into strips

Buttered teacakes, crumpets, Scotch pancakes or muffins

Crackers with cheese.

Potatoes

Chunky chips or wedges

Waffles

Potato cakes

Potato croquettes

Halved boiled potatoes, with or without skin

Vegetables

Vegetable sticks: - carrot, peppers, green beans, cucumber and celery

Sliced tomatoes

Broccoli or cauliflower florets

Vegetable fingers.

Fruit *Remove stones from all fruit*

Dried fruit, e.g. apple rings, apricots, pears or stoned dates and prunes

Sliced apple, pear, banana, kiwi, strawberries, melon, pineapple

Orange or tangerine segments.

Meat, fish and alternatives *Serve tender meat to aid with chewing*

Cut sliced meats or meat chunks

Chicken breast cut into chunks or sliced

Sausage, burgers, meatloaf, black pudding sliced

Sliced meat or chicken pie

Boiled egg, Scotch egg

Sliced quiche

Fish fingers

Fishcakes

Boned fish slices

Vegetarian sausages, burgers

Quorn sausages, burgers, fillets

Sweet foods

Scones, fruit loaf, malt loaf

Cake slices, biscuits

Fruit pies

Dairy

Serve full fat dairy products.

Add butter to savouries where possible.

Handy Super Snacks

Mini cocktail sausages

Chicken drumsticks

Mini burgers

Meatballs

Kebabs

Mini quiches

Frittatas

Mini pies, fishcakes, fish goujons, fish sticks

Crab sticks

Quartered boiled eggs / Scotch eggs

Pizza slices

Mini spring rolls

Steamed or raw vegetable fingers or spears

Salad sticks with a dip, e.g. hummus

Mini tomatoes, button mushrooms

Chips, potato wedges

Mini new potatoes

Breads, rolls, chapatis, naan bread, bagels, wraps and other types of breads

Bite dissolve crisps, e.g. Wotsits / Quavers, Skips.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about the information in this diet sheet, please contact the Dietetics Department on 020 8725 3049 / 1420 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm). Out of hours, please contact 020 8725 3049 and leave a voice mail.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm

Friday between 10am and 2pm.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing.

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS UK

The NHS provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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