

Eat well

A practical guide for supporting
people with dementia



With all of us in mind

Eating well

A diagnosis of dementia can bring many changes to family life however it is important for everyone, regardless of age, to eat a well balanced diet.

This booklet gives some practical ideas on how to adapt to the changes your family may be experiencing.

People with dementia may not eat in the same way as they used to, but it's still important to get a balance of different foods. This does not have to be 3 meals a day; it can be more frequent smaller meals or snacks. Try to have a variety of foods from all the food groups.

If you are caring for someone with dementia remember continue to look after yourself. It is important to make sure you are eating well too.

The eatwell plate

Use the eatwell plate to help you get the balance right. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.



Department of Health in association with the Welsh Government, the Scottish Government and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

Tips for encouraging people to eat and enjoy their food:

- Serve a variety of different foods
- A combination of colours makes foods look attractive
- A combination of textures makes meals more appealing
- Some people with dementia find their taste will change or their appetite decreases. Strongly flavoured or spicy foods can sometimes help.

Tips for encouraging people with a small appetite to eat

- Try increasing activity, as this can increase hunger. Short walks or chair based exercises can be useful
- Make sure appetite is not ruined by having lots of soft or sweetened drinks between meals. Try to avoid fizzy drinks.
- Try adding extra milk to hot drinks such as hot chocolates or milky coffee.
- Make sure food offered looks attractive and inviting.
- Consider serving food with stronger flavours as this can stimulate appetite. Particularly foods with spice or strong flavoured cheese.
- Use cues to help people with dementia get ready to eat – for example, the sight of people cooking, laying the table, the sound of pans clattering, or the smell of food cooking.
- Try having small, nutritious meals, more often throughout the day.
- Look for ideas in our picnic style food guide featured later in this booklet.
- Consider the environment in which you are eating as a noisy environment can be distracting.
- Remember to check for any physical problems such as mouth ulcers or dentures which could be affecting the appetite.

Over eating

Overeating can be a problem for some people with dementia who may forget they have eaten and eat twice, or who may worry about where future meals may come from and eat too much at mealtimes. A desire for sweet tasting foods can also mean that energy (calorie) intakes may be high. Many of these problems can be managed.

Not eating enough

Weight loss is common among older people with dementia, so it is particularly important to look for signs of unintended weight loss. Weight loss is caused by insufficient energy (calorie) intake, so it may be necessary to offer extra drinks and nutritious snacks during the day. If you are offering extra drinks between meals make sure they offer nutrients as well, for example try milky drinks, fresh fruit juices or smoothies.

People with dementia may forget to eat, forget they have eaten, be distracted from eating, have difficulty making choices, or be unable to communicate hunger or thirst.

It is therefore important that all those who support someone with dementia talk to each other, so that the person can be supported to eat enough each day, and that a written record is kept if meals and snacks seem to be missed.

Choosing sweet foods over savoury

People with dementia often prefer sweet foods to savoury. This means their diet may not be very balanced and they may not get all the nutrients they need. It may be useful to add some sweet ingredients to dishes, to encourage people to eat a range of foods – for example, adding sweet apricots to meat dishes, adding fruit to salads and snacks, adding honey to porridge or milky puddings, or adding jam to peanut butter sandwiches.

Practical aids to help people with eating and drinking

There are a number of practical aids for helping older people to eat independently, or which family, friends and support staff can use to help people to eat and drink more effectively. For example:

- Specially shaped cups, with one or two handles.
- Cutlery of different shapes, sizes, depths and materials. Short- handle cutlery is easier to manage, and handgrips or specially shaped handles may help some people to use a utensil.
- Plates and bowls which do not slip, which have higher sides to prevent spillage, or which are angled to make access to food easier.
- Insulated crockery which keeps food hot if mealtimes are lengthy.
- Non-slip mats which support crockery
- Special straws which can help those with a weaker suck, or 'nosey cups' to prevent the head from tilting too far back.

An occupational therapist can advise on practical aids and which would best suit individual circumstances.

Helping someone to eat

It is generally agreed that being helped with eating, while sometimes essential, can lead to a loss of self-esteem and a sense of powerlessness and dependency. Those who are able to eat independently, even if this involves using one piece of cutlery or by hand should be encouraged to do so.

When helping someone to eat consider

- Verbal prompting – 'open your mouth', 'chew', or 'swallow'.
- Touching food against the person's lips gives a non-verbal cue to open the lips.
- Giving indirect encouragement to eat – "This meal looks tasty".
- Lead the person to the table and encourage them to sit down.
- It may be more encouraging to sit down with them and eat together.
- Try using a brightly coloured plate, or a plate with a brightly coloured edge, this will help the person to see the food more easily.

Difficulties	Suggestions
Incorrectly uses cup or glass	Try verbal cues and show correct use. Offer a cup with handles or a straw.
Incorrectly uses spoon, fork or knife	Try verbal cues and show correct use. The person may benefit from additional aids or devices. Consult with occupational therapist. Offer foods that can be eaten by hand.
Unable to cut meat	Provide cut meats, soft meats or finger food. Knives that use a rocking motion rather than a sawing motion may be helpful for someone with reduced strength
Plate wanders on the table	Use a no-skid placemat or suction plate.
Eats other peoples food	Keep other peoples food out of reach. Sit nearby and encourage the person to eat from their own plate.
Mixes food together	Ignore as long as the food is eaten
Eats too fast	Offer food in small portions. Provide verbal cues to slow down, model slower eating.
Slow eating and prolonged mealtimes	Serve small portions at a time so the food stays warm and offer second helpings. Consider whether the person may benefit from having five smaller meals a day rather than three larger ones if they are struggling to eat enough calories.
Spills drink when drinking	Offer small amounts of fluid at a time in a stable cup with a handle that the person can easily grip. Offer a straw or a two handled cup if acceptable.
Difficulty getting food onto the utensils	A plate guard or lipped plate may help. A deeper spoon may help the food stay on the plate better than a flatter spoon. Finger foods may take the pressure off cutlery use.

Store cupboard and freezer essentials

Starchy foods

Tinned potatoes (Just warm up or use for mash)
Dried pasta
Rice
Cream crackers
Breakfast cereals
Oatcakes
Bake your own bread mix
Pizza bases

Fruit and vegetables

Tinned vegetables eg. carrots, peas, sweetcorn
Tinned tomatoes (for sauces)
Baked beans
Tinned fruit
Dried fruit
Frozen vegetables – there are a huge range available these days, peas, carrots, peppers, beans, mushrooms, even onions.

Meat, fish and other protein foods

Tinned fish eg. tuna, salmon, sardines
Corned beef
Tinned ham
Tinned meat eg. mince and onions, chicken in white sauce
Frozen meat or Quorn – mince, chicken pieces
Frozen fish – fillets of plain fish or fish in sauce

Milk and dairy foods

UHT or dried milk
Tinned or individual pots of custard
Tinned or individual pots of rice pudding
Cheese (this can be frozen at home)

Other useful store cupboard items:

Stock cubes
Worcestershire sauce
Tomato puree
Vegetable or sunflower oil
Dried mixed herbs and spices

Meal delivery services

Home delivery services are run throughout the UK, which can deliver frozen meals to people in their home. You can order by phone, post, online or call to order a brochure of foods available.

Oakhouse Foods 01756 796336
Wiltshire Farm Foods 0800 678060
WRVS 01977 696840

Alternatively you could get a small stock of ready made meals from your usual supermarket and keep them in your freezer for an emergency.

Most supermarkets now offer home delivery services as well. This could be more convenient for you – ask in store for more details on your next visit.

You could also try asking at your local café or pub as many now offer meal delivery services.



Meal ideas using store cupboard and freezer ingredients

Shepherds pie

Mince and onions, tinned tomatoes, stock cube, tinned potato, tinned or frozen vegetables.

Fish pie

Frozen fish in parsley sauce, tinned potato, peas and carrots.

Fish cakes

Tinned salmon or tuna, tinned potato, plus an egg or milk to bind. Serve with tinned or frozen veg.

Pasta bolognaise

Dried pasta, tinned tomatoes, mixed herbs, tomato puree, frozen mince.

Tuna pasta

Dried pasta, tinned tomatoes, mixed herbs, tomato puree, tinned tuna, frozen peppers.

Corned beef hash

Corned beef, frozen onions, tinned vegetables, stock cube, tinned tomatoes, tinned potatoes.

Pizza

Pizza Base, tinned tomatoes, tinned ham, tinned pineapple, frozen mushrooms, peppers.

Savoury mince

Tinned mince and onions, tinned potato, tinned or frozen vegetables.

Chilli and rice

Tinned or frozen mince, tinned tomatoes, tomato puree, tinned kidney beans, rice.

Chicken pie

Tinned chicken in white sauce, tinned potato, tinned or frozen carrots.

Picnic style foods

These are foods that can be easily eaten by hand and may be useful when caring for a person who is finding it difficult to use cutlery.

They should be easy to hold and eat. Small bite sized pieces of moist foods are best.

Mini foods are often better than cutting up full sized versions which may fall apart eg. mini quiche and cocktail sausages.

••• Some ideas include •••

Cereal bars
Toast
Teacakes
English muffins/ pitta bread/
chapatti
Sandwiches
Crumpets
Breadsticks
Crackers
Chicken drumsticks
Mini sausages
Mini quiche

Fish sticks
Chicken or fish goujons
Pizza slices
Boiled egg
Samosa/pakora/onion bhaji
Spring roll
Mini omelette
Dried fruit
Fresh fruit pieces
Raw or steamed vegetables:
Carrot sticks
Broccoli or cauliflower florets

Green beans
Baby corn
Chips or potato wedges
Cherry tomatoes
Button mushrooms
Yogurt in a tube
Slices or sticks of cheese
Ice lolly
Ice cream in a cone
Mini apple pie
Cake slices
malt loaf/fruit loaf

Slow cooker beef stew

Slow cookers are great for planning in advance when you're busy and don't have much time but you can still have a home cooked meal ready.

They can also save you money, as the slow cooking method uses less energy than a conventional oven and makes cheaper cuts of meat such as stewing and braising steak, more tender and succulent.

Ingredients

Makes 4 servings

Braising steak (or any stewing meat), cubed

Flour (to dust the meat)

1 onion, peeled and chopped

2 carrots, chopped and peeled

6 large mushrooms, chopped

1 small swede, peeled and chopped

1 stock cube

Method

1. Dust the meat in flour. Heat a teaspoon of oil in a frying pan and brown the meat, just enough to seal it.
2. Dissolve the stock cube in ½ pint of hot water.
3. Add the meat and chopped vegetables into the slow cooker and pour on the stock.
4. Cook on low for roughly 8 hours.
5. Serve on its own or with potatoes or a slice of bread.

This recipe makes 4 servings so you could have it the next day or put in the freezer for an emergency "ready meal".

Quick Vegetable Curry

Preparation time: Less than 30 minutes

Cooking Time: 10-20 minutes

Serves 4

Ingredients

1 red onion, peeled and sliced

2 courgettes, sliced

2 carrots, peeled and sliced

1 small cauliflower, separated into small florets

1 tablespoon Oil or Spray Fry

2-4 teaspoons curry paste (depending on taste)

400g tinned chickpeas, drained

4 tablespoons low fat crème fraiche

4 tablespoons vegetable stock

4 pitta breads to serve

Method

1. Stir fry the onion, courgette, carrot and cauliflower in oil with the curry paste until soft.
2. Add the chick peas, vegetable stock and season well.
3. Cover and heat gently for 5-10 minutes until heated through
4. Stir in the crème fraiche, heat gently
5. Warm the pitta bread, and serve with the veg curry.

If you make the recipe up to stage 3 then it can be frozen. Defrost and add the crème fraiche while heating through.

Adding Flavour to traditional dishes

Some people with dementia find that their tastes change and dishes they once enjoyed now taste bland and uninteresting. Here are a few tips on how to add flavour to dishes and make them more appealing.

Herbs

Fresh or dried herbs can add flavour to dishes such as soups, stews and sauces.

Dried mixed herbs can be kept for a long time in your cupboards and can be bought cheaply from supermarkets – look out for the “Value” ranges which are very reasonable and just as good.

Oregano and **basil** are great herbs to add to any tomato based dish eg. pasta sauces, tomato soup.

Bay leaves can be useful for adding flavour to soups and stews.

Rosemary and **thyme** go well with meat especially lamb. Try mixing with a little oil and rubbing onto meat before cooking.

Spices

Ginger gives a warming flavour, and can be used to spice up most dishes. Use fresh root ginger (peeled) for savoury dishes (great in Chinese style food) and stem ginger for sweet dishes. Ginger goes very well with plain ice cream.

Chilli will spice up any dish. It can be bought fresh or as dried powder or flakes.

Garlic has a strong flavour which may appeal to someone who has difficulty tasting foods. Add to sauces and stews or try mixing with a little oil and serving over potatoes.

Paprika has a warming flavour and is good for adding flavour to dishes such as stew and pasta sauces.

Curry powder can be bought relatively cheaply and adds spice to dishes.

Don't forget pepper! Ground pepper adds warmth and enhances the flavour of any dish.

Condiments

Worcestershire sauce

A dash of Worcestershire sauce can add flavour to foods such as baked beans, shepherds pie, spaghetti bolognese, home made burgers, stews, cheese on toast.

Mustard

Try adding wholegrain mustard to mashed potatoes as a side dish or on top of a cottage pie. Mustard also goes well with meat eg. sausages or ham.

Marinades

Marinades are used to add flavour to meat and fish or vegetarian options such as Quorn. This is done by soaking the meat or fish in the marinade for a few hours to allow the flavours to infuse before cooking.

Honey and Mustard Marinade

Wholegrain mustard mixed with some honey and lemon juice makes a great sauce for meat such as pork chops.

Mix 1 tablespoon of mustard with a tablespoon of honey and the juice of half a lemon. Pour over the chops and bake in the oven for about 30 minutes.

Citrus Marinade

Ideal for chicken or pork

Mix all the ingredients together and pour over the meat or fish.

Juice of 1 lemon

Juice of 2 limes

1 tablespoon of honey

1 tablespoon of oil

1 tsp ground coriander

1 tsp paprika

1 tsp cumin

1 tablespoon fresh chopped mint

Chilli Marinade

2 chopped, deseeded fresh red chillies

1 clove crushed garlic

1 tsp ground black pepper

60ml white wine vinegar

1 tbsp caster sugar

2 tbsp sunflower oil

1 tbsp freshly chopped parsley

Mix all the ingredients together and pour over the meat before cooking.

This booklet has been produced to provide practical information and advice for families and carers of people with dementia. It has not been designed to provide medical advice, and the first port of call for any medical assistance or advice should always be your GP. We hope you find this booklet a useful resource.

Where to go for help:

If you are concerned about the memory of a family member or friend it is important that they see their GP to get any help or support required. If your family member or friend already has a diagnosis of dementia and you are concerned about their eating habits, losing or gaining weight – then it may be necessary to see a dietician. You may be referred to a dietician via your GP, or other health professionals you maybe in contact with.

If you are already attending memory services you can ask for additional advice or support from the specialist dietician within the team at your next appointment.

You can also contact the Wakefield and Five Towns branch of the Alzheimer's Society for information, support and advice 01924 373264.

Produced by the health and wellbeing development worker team in partnership with the community food and health team.

For further information please contact 01977 705473





Information courtesy of The Caroline Walker Trust 2011