



# You Can!

## Make mealtimes easier for someone living with dementia



Proper nutrition is important to keep the body strong and healthy. For a person with Alzheimer's or dementia, poor nutrition may increase behavioral symptoms and cause weight loss.

Staying hydrated may be a problem as well. Encourage fluids by offering small cups of water or other liquids throughout the day or foods with high water content, such as fruit, soups, milkshakes and smoothies.

During the middle and late stages of Alzheimer's, distractions, too many choices, and changes in perception, taste and smell can make eating more difficult. These tips can help:

- **Limit distractions.** Serve meals in quiet surroundings, away from the television and other distractions. Avoid placing items on the table (such as table arrangements or plastic fruit) that might distract or confuse the person.
- **Distinguish food from the plate.** Changes in visual and spatial abilities may make it tough for someone with dementia to distinguish food from the plate or the plate from the table. Use white plates/bowls with a contrasting color placemat. Avoid patterns
- **Check the food temperature before serving.** A person with dementia might not be able to tell if something is too hot to eat or drink.
- **Serve only one or two foods at a time.** Too many foods at once may be overwhelming. For example, mashed potatoes followed by meat.
- **Be flexible to food preferences.** Keep long-standing personal preferences in mind but be aware that a person with dementia may suddenly develop new food preferences or reject foods that were liked in the past.
- **Allow plenty of time to eat.** Offer reminders to chew and swallow carefully. Keep in mind that it may take an hour or longer to finish eating.
- **Eat together.** Make meals an enjoyable social event so everyone looks forward to the experience. Research suggests that people eat better when they are in the company of others.
- **Keep in mind the person may not remember eating.** If the person continues to ask about eating breakfast, consider serving several breakfasts — juice, followed by toast, followed by cereal.

Excerpts from [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)

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