

Department of
NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

Nutrition Support for Dementia Care



Nutrition in Dementia

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Dementia can lead to changes in appetite, sense of taste, smell and thirst, chewing and swallowing ability. As the condition progresses, individuals with dementia may also begin to notice behavioural changes that can affect eating.

These changes can ultimately affect their nutritional intake and health.

Learning how to manage these changes can help optimise the nutrition and wellbeing of your loved ones.

Behavioural Changes that can Impact Nutrition

- Unable to sit long enough to finish a meal
- Food is hoarded in mouth but not swallowed
- Food is not chewed sufficiently
- Reduced appetite

Middle Stage

Early Stage

- Difficulty shopping, cooking and storing food
- Eating spoiled foods
- Eating non-foods (e.g. wax or plastic fruit)

Advanced Stage

- Unable to self feed
- Refusal to open mouth and turn away when food is offered
- Loss of ability to ask for foods / fluids
- Swallowing difficulties

Nutrition Challenges in Dementia

Changes in Food Preferences

Your loved ones may have altered food preferences, difficulty in recognising certain foods, flavours, smells and textures.

They may start to dislike food that they previously enjoyed.



Co-ordination Problems

As dementia progresses, using cutlery to eat or drink can become increasingly difficult.



Changes in Mood

Your loved ones may become withdrawn, agitated, distracted or upset. This may then affect their behaviour during meal times and reduce their food intake.



Changes in Memory

Your loved ones may forget to eat, or think they have already eaten. This can lead to missing of meals or excessive consumption of food, which can result in weight loss or weight gain.



Dementia may also affect how your loved ones recognise hunger, thirst, smells or fullness.

Strategies to Improve Nutrition and Hydration

Difficulty in getting foods into mouth?

- ✓ Show them how to eat by holding a spoon and getting them to imitate
- ✓ Use "hand over hand" approach
- ✓ Encourage more finger foods

Problems with Co-ordination



Difficulty in handling cutlery or cups?

- ✓ Cut up their foods and allow them to use their hands to eat
- ✓ Consult an Occupational Therapist for adaptive cutlery

Changes in Memory

Unable to recognise foods?

- ✓ Explain what the food is by using pictures



Forget to eat or drink?

- ✓ Keep a routine
Schedule daily meal and snack times.
- ✓ Keep snacks and fluids within easy reach



Strategies to Improve Nutrition and Hydration



Distracted from eating?

- ✓ Use hand or verbal cues to remind them to eat
- ✓ Remove distractions such as TV. Try playing relaxing music

- ✓ Table should be neat and tidy
- ✓ Take out a smaller portion of the food onto their plate

Hides, throws, or plays with food?

Food is held in the mouth?

- ✓ Use verbal cues to encourage them to chew
- ✓ Massage their cheeks gently

Behavioural Changes

Too drowsy or difficult to wake during meal times?

- ✓ Offer a gentle touch to wake them up
- ✓ Optimise eating at other times of the day when they are more awake

- ✓ Encourage eating at another time
- ✓ Offer favourite and familiar foods first
- ✓ Offer finger foods

Refuse food or avoids eating?



Strategies to Improve Nutrition and Hydration

Poor Intake of Food and/or Drinks

Due to medical conditions, depression, pain, tiredness or medications



- ✓ Encourage consumption of high energy, high protein snacks and nourishing drinks
- ✓ Fortify food and drinks[^]
- ✓ Encourage finger foods

- ✓ Consider oral nutritional supplements
- ✓ To ensure adequate hydration, use a cup or bottle with measurement for ease of monitoring

Example of Finger Foods

- **Biscuits**
- **Cake**
- **Cream puff**
- **Fish cake**
- **Goreng pisang**
- **Jelly**
- **Kueh**
- **Nuts**
- **Spring roll**
- **Siew Mai**

[^] For more tips and ideas on food fortification, high calorie snacks and nourishing fluids, you may refer to another brochure by scanning this QR code:

Small Appetite &
Unintentional Weight Loss



Other Information

Monitoring Indicators

Individuals with dementia are at increased risk of poor nutrition. Use the following self-screening tool (two questions) to identify if your loved one is at risk.

Are you or your loved one:

- Experiencing unplanned weight loss (3 kg or more in past 3 to 6 months)?
- Eating lesser than before (especially if less than ½ of usual in the past 5 days or more)?

If you have answered "YES" to either or both of the above questions, or face further challenges with nutrition and hydration, it is recommended that you consult with a Dietitian or Doctor for a more detailed assessment.



Other Useful Resources

If you or your loved one require more information and support on dementia, you can call Health Promotion Board's Dementia Infoline at 1800 223 1123 or Alzheimer's Disease Association (ADA)'s helpline at 6377 0700 (www.alz.org.sg).

Clinics B2
Nutrition and Dietetics
TTSH Medical Centre, Level B2

Contact:
6357 7000 (Central Hotline)



Scan the QR Code with your smart phone to
access the information online or visit
<http://bit.ly/TTSHHealth-Library>

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