

Eating & Appetite Changes in Dementia: A Guide for Patients & Families

Changes in eating habits and appetite are common in people living with dementia. Some individuals may eat less, forget to eat, or lose interest in food. Others may eat more than usual or crave certain foods. These changes can be related to memory loss, changes in taste or smell, difficulty recognizing food, or problems using utensils. Understanding these changes can help caregivers support healthy nutrition and reduce stress during meals.

Common Eating Changes

- Forgetting to eat meals
- Loss of appetite
- Eating very slowly
- Difficulty using utensils
- Preferring sweets or certain foods
- Eating too much or asking for food repeatedly

Why Eating Problems Occur

- Memory problems that cause the person to forget meals
- Changes in taste or smell
- Difficulty recognizing food
- Problems with coordination or swallowing
- Depression or illness
- Medication side effects

Helpful Strategies

Maintain a Routine

- Serve meals at the same time each day
- Provide a quiet and consistent eating environment

Simplify Meals

- Offer simple foods that are easy to eat
- Cut food into small pieces
- Use finger foods when utensils are difficult to use

Reduce Distractions

- Turn off television or loud noise
- Keep the dining area calm and well-lit

Encourage Hydration

- Offer water or other drinks regularly
- Provide foods with high water content such as fruits or soups

Offer Smaller Meals

- Smaller meals and snacks throughout the day may be easier than large meals

When to Contact a Healthcare Provider

- Significant weight loss
- Difficulty swallowing
- Frequent choking or coughing during meals
- Sudden changes in appetite

Tips for Caregivers

- Be patient and allow extra time for meals
- Sit and eat together when possible
- Encourage independence while offering support
- Seek help from healthcare providers if nutrition becomes a concern

National Organizations & Resources

✓ Alzheimer's Association

☎ 800-272-3900 | 🌐 alz.org

✓ National Institute on Aging

🌐 nia.nih.gov

✓ Family Caregiver Alliance

🌐 caregiver.org

✓ Eldercare Locator

☎ 1-800-677-1116 | 🌐 eldercare.acl.gov

Final Notes

- Eating changes are common in dementia and may evolve over time.
- Simple meal strategies and calm environments often improve nutrition.
- Caregivers should seek support if weight loss or swallowing problems occur.