

# Eating and drinking strategies for dementia

Challenge	Intervention
Forgets or misinterprets or does not recognise body signals of hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer food and drinks frequently throughout the day as will be unlikely to ask for a drink.</li> <li>• Have easy access to drinks and food in people's rooms and communal areas.</li> </ul>
Not able to recognise food / plays with food due to lack of environmental cues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try ensuring environmental changes to signal mealtimes such as altering the appearance of the table with tablecloths, placemats, napkins etc.</li> </ul>
Not able to use utensils correctly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limit the number of utensils available.</li> <li>• May need help with cutting up food.</li> </ul>
Not able to use utensils, can eat finger foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure variety of finger foods (self-feeding provides more sensory / motor feedback to encourage eating )</li> <li>• Try serving soups or hot cereals in a mug and cut fruit and vegetables in to bite size pieces that can be easily picked up.</li> <li>• Serve sauces and gravies in bowls which food can be dipped into rather than pouring over a meal.</li> <li>• Use 'edible containers' such as ice cream cones.</li> </ul>
Not able to make choices regarding food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be aware of likes and dislikes. Offer choice</li> <li>• Try to use pictorial cues or actual food as choices</li> </ul>
Establishing routine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish the same routine for each meal.</li> <li>• Reinforce with one stage directions and visual and gestural cueing.</li> <li>• Placing the cutlery in the preferred hand, use hand over hand to prompt the process of eating.</li> </ul>
Poor attention span, unable to complete a meal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use simple verbal prompts and touch to redirect to the task of eating.</li> <li>• Having 5 or 6 small meals a day for residents who are unable to complete a full meal and become agitated at attempts to refocus.</li> </ul>

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Wandering / leaves the table during the meal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make meals a combination of sitting and eating, and walking and eating - go with the person to minimise agitation</li> <li>• Use finger foods from a bowl or sandwiches made with fillings which hold together easily.</li> </ul>
Overfills mouth / eats pieces which are too big to swallow safely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide foods which are pre-cut into bite size pieces, use small spoon / utensils.</li> <li>• Encourage clients to clear mouth before next spoonful.</li> </ul>
Holds food in mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal, visual and if appropriate use touch as prompts to swallow. Try offering empty spoon to prompt client to swallow existing food in mouth. Check for residue after eating.</li> </ul>
Attempts to eat things which are not edible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove any unnecessary garnishes or inedible containers / flowers from table / tray.</li> </ul>
Pours liquids over foods or mixes main course and dessert on one plate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide drinks and courses separately</li> </ul>
Takes food from other residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use visual boundaries such as placemats.</li> <li>• Square tables provide better physical boundaries than round tables.</li> </ul>
Perceptual difficulties such as inability to judge edge of plate and table	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use colour contrasts i.e. food against plate and plate against tray / table.</li> </ul>
Anxiety regarding where to sit (may insist on same chair each time) May insist on sitting with same people / react badly if sat with someone they don't like	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider using name cards or simply removing the chair until time for that individual to come to the table.</li> <li>• May need to be seated alone if experiencing hostility or paranoia.</li> <li>• Avoid making last minute changes to seating plans, be aware of peer groups.</li> </ul>
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a range of table sizes available, square tables better for separating space, bright glare from lights and loud music can increase agitation. Cups and cutlery should be easy to hold.</li> </ul>

Adapted from an article by Sue Curfman, Nursing Home 2005.

