

# **MAKING MEALTIMES MEANINGFUL FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY DEMENTIA**

**MAKING mealtimes  
stress free**



**Support people to continue  
to eat independently**



## **HIA Create a calm, comfortable and social environment**

- Sitting around a table together can help with enjoyment of food and allow copying of others eating behaviours

**NOTE: Some people may be self-conscious and embarrassed to eat in company.**

- Try to encourage a relaxed mealtime by communicating calmly and giving support
- If more settled during certain times of the day, consider altering mealtimes
- Play some soothing music. Reduce distractions such as loud background noises or television

## **Preparing for meals**

- Ask if the person needs to go to the toilet before a meal
- Make sure they are wearing their hearing aids or dentures if needed
- Ensure any dentures are clean, well-fitting and comfortable. Good oral hygiene is important
- Sitting correctly at a table will help with chewing and swallowing. This can also help reduce feelings of fullness

- If struggling with a knife and fork, try using a spoon, specially adapted cutlery or practical aids eg: lightweight cups, high sided bowls, plain coloured plates or non slip mats.

Available from: [www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)

- Try guiding their hands to their mouth to prompt eating
- Give verbal encouragement and prompts such as:

*'How's your tea?'*

*'Have you nearly finished?'*

*'This shepherd's pie looks lovely.'*

- If wandering at mealtimes or eating with their hands, try offering:

**'High calorie finger foods.'**

A factsheet is available from:

[www.bfwh.nhs.uk/communitydietetics](http://www.bfwh.nhs.uk/communitydietetics)

- Try making snacks and drinks readily available so they can help themselves

**NOTE: Try not to worry about any mess! Paper napkins, wet wipes and wipe clean tablecloths may be useful.**

## Allow enough time to eat

- Be patient and don't rush mealtimes
- Avoid removing plates until everyone has finished, to avoid any signals to stop eating
- Encourage eating if attention drifts
- For slow eaters, try pre-warmed plates or a plate warmer to keep food hot

## Minimising confusion at MEALTIMES

## Make food easier to see

- Try to have a well-lit room so meals are visible
- Ensure glasses are clean and worn at mealtimes
- Have food and drinks in line of sight
- Explain what is on the plate before they start their meal
- Use plain plates, cups and bowls in a colour that contrasts with the food and the table. Try to use primary colours i.e. red, yellow and blue



## Present one course at a time

- Provide only the set of required cutlery needed for each individual course

## Keep mealtimes 'clutter free'

- Prevent distractions eg: vases, candles, ornaments, excessive condiments or patterned tablecloths

## Turning meals into MEANINGFUL occasions



## Stimulate appetite and interest in food

- Talk about **favourite** foods eg: childhood favourites that link to older memories
- Show pictures of foods that are being cooked. Get involved with making meals and clearing up
- Talk about cooking smells
- Setting a table together can help someone to recognise mealtimes
- Celebrate special occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries etc.
- Attend events such as coffee morning's tea dances or lunch clubs

## References:

Alzheimer's Society (2009). Alzheimer's Society guide to catering for people with dementia.

Caroline Walker Trust (2011). Eating Well: Supporting older people and older people with dementia.

Nutrition and diet resources (revised 2017). Eating well with Dementia. A carers guide.

[www.bfwh.nhs.uk/communitydietetics](http://www.bfwh.nhs.uk/communitydietetics)