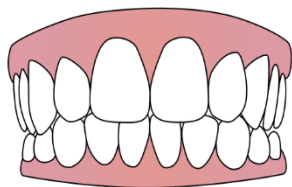

Dementia: Challenges with Chewing, Swallowing, and Self-feeding

What is Dementia?

Dementia is a group of symptoms related to a decline in memory or other thinking skills that make it hard to do daily activities. Dementia can cause changes in thinking, behavior, feelings, appetite, chewing, and swallowing.

Nutrition Basics

There is no “diet” for people with Dementia. It is important to eat a variety of foods and maintain a healthy weight. Your Dietitian can help you stay healthy with Dementia.



Problems Chewing

Some people with dementia can't chew their food. This can cause choking, infection, and weight loss. Use the tips below to prevent these issues:

- Cut foods into small pieces, cook meats until they are tender, and puree foods in a blender if needed.
- Make soft foods like scrambled eggs, oatmeal, mashed potatoes, creamed corn, tuna, or egg salad.
- Make sure dentures fit well. Look for sores in the mouth, tender gums, and broken or missing teeth. See the dentist as needed.
- Take to time to eat, try not to rush meals. Eating may take a little longer.

Problems Swallowing

Dementia can change behavior. If your loved one gets angry and refuses to take bites, chew, or swallow food don't think they are trying to challenge you on purpose. They may not remember how or when to chew or swallow. To help with swallowing problems try these tips:

- Mix foods with sauces or gravies.
- Try putting pills in pudding, applesauce, or cottage cheese. Some medicines can be crushed and mixed with juices.

**Always check with your pharmacist before crushing medicine!
Crushing some medicines makes them not work.**

- Eat sitting up straight with the head slightly forward.
- Check your loved one's mouth at the end of the meal to make sure no food has been "pocketed" (stuck) in the cheeks.
- Peanut butter can be good for protein, but it and other sticky foods can be tough to swallow. Mixing peanut butter with milk, pudding, yogurt, or applesauce can help.
- Sometimes swallowing foods is fine but thin liquids like water, juice, or tea cause choking. Your Dietitian may recommend adding a thickener to thin liquids to prevent choking.
- Learn how to perform the Heimlich maneuver in case of emergency.

Feeding Challenges

With Dementia people can have difficulties feeding themselves or drinking out of a cup.

- Cutting up foods before giving your loved one a plate can make it easier for them to eat it.
- There are "adaptive utensils" that could help. These include forks and spoons with large handles, cups with lids and spouts or straws to make drinking easier.



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- Divided plates that have separate spots for each food can also help. Talk with your Dietitian about how to get these.
 - It is good to help your loved one eat independently if possible. There may come a time when you need to feed him or her to make sure they don't lose too much weight and to get the nutrition they need.

Resources

Your Dietitian can continue to help you with resources, but you can also review these online.

- Meals on Wheels- <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/> “VA does not endorse and is not responsible for the content of the linked Web site.”
- Alzheimer’s Association- <https://www.alz.org/> “VA does not endorse and is not responsible for the content of the linked Web site.”