
Dementia: Challenges with Poor Appetite and Weight Loss

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.

Poor Appetite, Not Eating Enough

People with Dementia aren't always hungry. Try these ideas to make sure you or your loved one are eating enough:

- Set specific meal and snack times. Make eating part of your routine.
- Eat meals together as a group or family. Making meals social can help you eat more.
- Limit distractions at mealtime. For example, don't eat and watch TV.
- Eat 4-6 small meals instead of 2-3 big meals. Small meals are not as overwhelming.
- Some medicines lower appetite. If you start a new medicine and feel less hungry tell your doctor.
- Use solid color placemats and plain white plates. This makes foods easier to identify.
- Serve only 1-2 foods at a time.

Weight Loss

People with Dementia are often less active, so they need fewer calories. Your Dietitian can make sure you or your loved one is getting enough nutrition and not losing too much weight.

To gain or maintain weight try these tips:

Add high calorie foods like butter, gravies, oils, sour cream, whole milk, coconut milk, cheese, avocado, jelly, honey, nuts, or peanut butter to foods.

Homemade smoothies can help with weight. See the last page for some recipes.

If foods are not enough, adding nutrition supplements for a few months may be an option. Your Dietitian will tell you if this is needed to help you or your loved one stay healthy!

Resources

Contact your VA Dietitian to help with more resources.

Smoothies

Smoothies can help add calories, fluid, and nutrients all at once!

Peanut Butter Banana Smoothie Recipe:

Ingredients:

- 1 large, ripe banana, broken into pieces and frozen
- ¼ cup of peanut butter or any other nut butter
- 1 cup of whole milk or coconut milk (full fat from the can.)
- **you can use other milk substitutes, but they won't have as many calories.
- Optional to add in 1-2 tablespoons of cocoa powder for chocolate flavor

Directions:

Place all ingredients into a blender and blend until smooth.

Build your own smoothie!

Choose one ingredient from each group below then blend until smooth.

- **½ cup to 1 cup of fruit** (fresh or frozen)
- **Add a fat for calories and creamy taste**
 - half or whole Avocado

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- 1/4 cup of any nut or seed butter
 - **Sweeteners**
 - 1 tablespoon of Maple syrup OR
 - 1 tablespoon of Honey
 - 2-4 Medjool Dates
 - **Add 1-2 Cups Liquid:**
 - Coconut milk (full fat from can)
 - whole milk
 - **Need extra protein? Add one of these:**
 - 1/2 cup of tofu
 - 1/2 cup Greek Yogurt
 - 1/3 cup powdered milk