



A guide for families, friends and other representatives

Supporting dementia-friendly mealtimes and dining experiences at home

People living with dementia may experience changes in the way they eat and experience mealtimes and the dining experience.

Positive mealtimes and dining experiences for a person living with dementia focus on their needs and preferences. People living with dementia have the right to choose:



who they eat with



where they eat



what they want to eat and drink



when they want to eat and drink

You can support someone living with dementia to eat and drink well by:



Creating dementia-friendly mealtimes and dining experiences



Advocating for their needs, choices and preferences



Knowing the signs and seeking help when needed



Supporting good nutrition and hydration





Creating dementia-friendly mealtimes and dining experiences

During mealtimes, consider the person's:

- normal eating habits, including time and place
- preferences for mealtimes such as lighting, music or background noise
- environment and mealtime set up
 - is the table uncluttered?
 - are table surfaces, plates and bowls contrasting colours?
 - is there enough space and lighting?
 - are food and drinks within reach and easily accessible?
 - do they have the equipment and/or supports they may need?
E.g. suitable seating, adaptive cutlery and any other equipment that may be recommended to support and encourage independence.

Be present during mealtimes when you can. It may help to prompt and encourage the person to eat and drink and provide support and assistance when required.



Advocating for needs, choices and preferences

When you advocate for someone, you represent their needs, choices and preferences. You take their side and support them. You can do this by discussing these with the person you are supporting, and if suitable, their care team. Remember, preferences may change, so it's important to check with the person often.

- Ask questions to understand and support needs and preferences, including how the person chooses to eat, drink and dine.
- Provide favourite or familiar foods.
- Involve them in everyday tasks if they choose, including planning and preparing for mealtimes.
- Sometimes people living with dementia need extra support or assistance to eat and drink.
- Discuss with their care team, including health professionals, what recommended strategies may best support the person.



Supporting good nutrition and hydration

- Provide a healthy, balanced diet.
- Have food and drink options available and accessible at all times of day.
- Offer and re-offer a range of food and drink choices.
- Consider finger foods and snacks that can be eaten easily without utensils.
- Discuss home delivered meals or pre-prepared meal options with the person and/or their aged care service provider.
- Monitor for signs of dehydration and offer a variety of drinks regularly.
- Discuss with their care team, including, health professionals, what recommended strategies may best support the person. You can talk to them about:
 - what a healthy balanced diet should include
 - the changes a person living with dementia may experience in their nutrition and hydration needs
 - what to do when a person is losing weight, losing their appetite, having difficulties when eating and drinking, declining or forgetting to eat, or drink or overeating.



Knowing the signs and seeking help when needed

Keep an eye out for changes in the person's:

- food, drink and dining preferences and habits
- appetite
- weight (losing or gaining a lot)
- taste and smell
- behaviour or mood
- teeth and mouth health
- eating, drinking and swallowing and if they're finding it difficult.

Keep an eye out for signs of dehydration such as thirst, dry mouth and tongue, or cracked lips. Other signs may be dark urine, dizziness and/or confusion.

Dementia affects people differently, including any changes that may occur – if any.

Supporting mealtimes for people living with dementia can be challenging. Remember to prioritise time for yourself and reach out for help when needed.

If you notice any changes, let their care team know, including their doctor and any other health professionals who can provide further support and advice. If the person is coughing during eating or drinking, urgently contact a General Practitioner to consider underlying medical issues and a speech pathologist for a full assessment.



Frequently asked questions

1. Who can help me to support someone living with dementia to eat and drink well?

The following medical and health professionals can support:

- **Doctor:** medical assessment and treatment.
- **Dietitian:** nutritional assessment and recommendations.
- **Dentist:** an assessment of oral health including an evaluation of a person's teeth, gums and dentures.
- **Speech pathologist:** assessment when there are swallowing and communication difficulties.
- **Occupational therapist:** mealtime assessment and recommendations, including safe positioning and mealtime supports such as adaptive equipment.
- **Behaviour support specialist:** supporting changes in behaviour.

Speak with their aged care service provider or doctor to discuss any concerns you may have and arrange a visit with a health professional for further support when required. Regular assessments with health professionals will help to identify issues early and provide strategies that are right for the person you are supporting.

Other Dementia support:

- Access the [Dementia Australia website](#) for advice, practical strategies for supporting people living with dementia and information about carer support groups or call – **1800 100 500**.
- For information about carer respite, visit [My Aged Care website](#).
- Access [Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Service](#) (DBMAS) or call **1800 699 799** for advice and support for family members of people living with dementia.
- Call the National Dementia Helpline **1800 100 500**.

2. Who do I talk to if I have concerns about aged care services who provide food, nutrition and dining for someone living at home?

If you've already spoken to the provider, or you don't feel comfortable talking to them about your concerns, you can contact the Commission on the Food, Nutrition and Dining Hotline – **1800 844 044**.

For more information about the hotline and what to expect when you call, read the [Do you have questions, concerns or complaints about your food, nutrition and dining in aged care?](#) factsheet.



Phone
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Web
agedcarequality.gov.au



Write
Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
GPO Box 9819, in your capital city