



Promoting Successful Mealtimes

Considering Environment, Nutrition, and Environment

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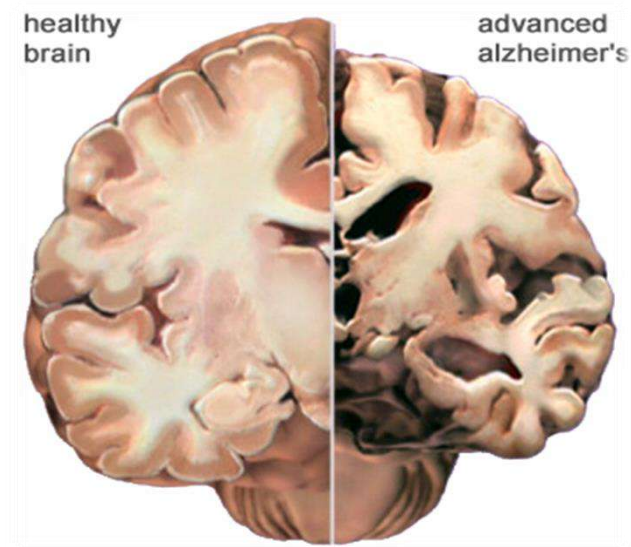
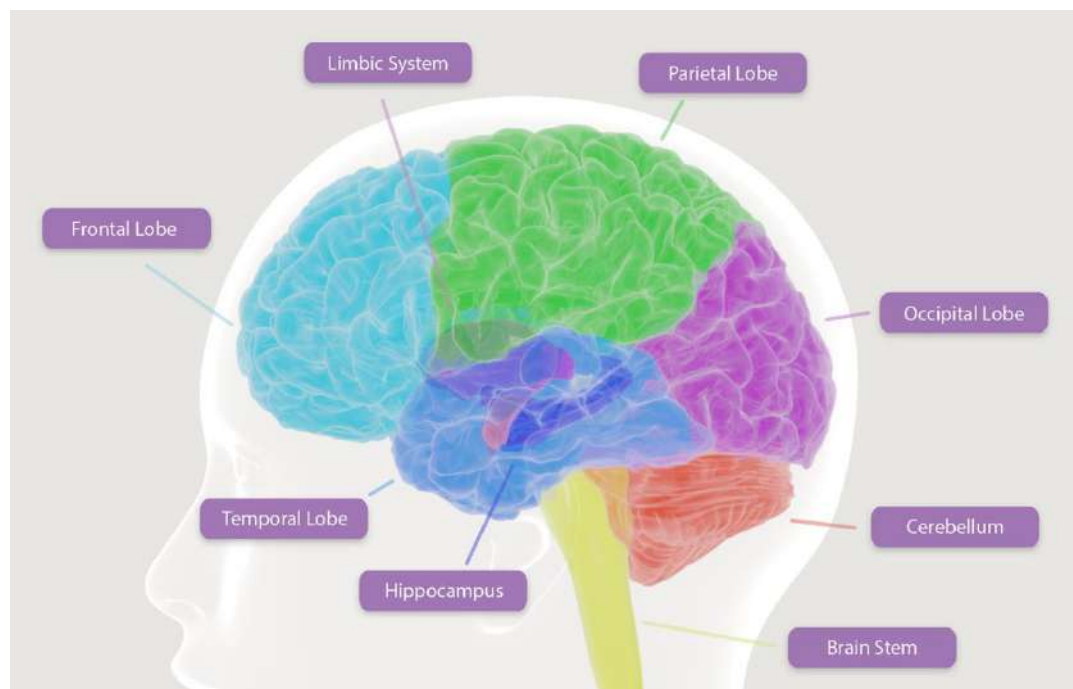
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What is your biggest challenge during mealtimes?



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Key Point - Dementia affects MANY skills needed for successful meals



Brain Changes

- **Memory Changes**

- May forget they have not eaten
- May ask for multiple meals
- May forget favorite foods

- **Recognition Changes (Agnosia)**

- May not recognize food
- May not know what utensils are for
- May not identify a glass as something to drink from

- **Attention Changes**

- Easily distracted
- Stops eating when conversation starts
- Focuses on one food item only



Brain Changes



- **Sensory Changes**

- Food may taste bland
- Cravings for sweets often increase
- Hot and cold foods may be harder to distinguish

- **Physical Changes**

- Difficulty chewing
- Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)
- Reduced hand coordination
- Increased fatigue during meals

- **Real Example:**

- A resident may stare at a plate of spaghetti and say, "What is this?" even though it was once their favorite meal.



Executive Chef's Cares Approach

- **C** – Create the environment
- **A** – Allow extra time
- **R** – Respect preferences
- **E** – Encourage independence



Create the Environment

- Turn off television
- Reduce background noise
- Remove unnecessary items from the table
- Use simple place settings & color contrast
- Ensure good lighting
- Remove clutter
- Comfortable Seating - 90 – 90 – 90 Positioning



Allow Extra Time

- Create routines
- Plan for 30–60 minutes per meal
- Avoid rushing
- Offer gentle reminders



Respect Preferences

*Food is connected to memory and comfort

- Filipino:

- Chicken Adobo
- Arroz Caldo
- Pancit
- Fresh fruit



- American:

- Meatloaf
- Mashed potatoes
- Apple pie



- Italian:

- Meatballs
- Risotto
- Minestrone Soup



Familiar foods often increase intake better than trendy or unfamiliar foods.



Example Menu

Breakfast

- Scrambled eggs
- Fresh fruit
- Toast
- Orange juice



Lunch

- Chicken noodle soup
- Turkey sandwich
- Fruit cup



Dinner

- Baked chicken
- Mashed potatoes
- Green beans
- Peach cobbler

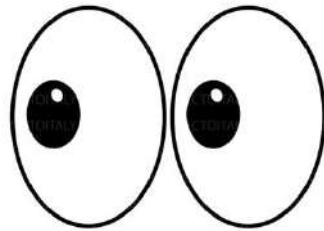


Encourage Independence

- Allow participation whenever possible.
- Examples:
 - Finger foods
 - Easy-grip utensils
 - Adaptive cups
 - Divided plates
- Remember: The goal is not perfection. The goal is preserving dignity and independence.



Remember
**People living with dementia eat
with their eyes first.**



Creating the perfect plate

Avoid:

- Overfilled plates
- Mixed foods piled together
- White foods on white plates
- Complex garnishes



Use:

- Smaller portions
- Color contrast
- Simple plating
- One food at a time if necessary



Creating the perfect plate

- **Less Effective:**

Turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy, vegetables, and roll crowded onto one plate.

- **More Effective:**

Turkey, carrots, and potatoes separated with clear color contrast.

- Blue, red, or green plates often improve food recognition.



Food Presentation Matters

Poor Presentation



Good Presentation



- ✓ Smaller portions look less overwhelming
- ✓ Bright colors improve visibility
- ✓ Separate foods improve recognition
- ✓ Avoid overcrowding plates



Increasing Calories and Nutrition

- When intake declines, every bite matters.
- Boost calories by adding:
 - Avocado
 - Olive oil
 - Nut butters
 - Whole milk
 - Cheese
 - Eggs
 - Greek yogurt



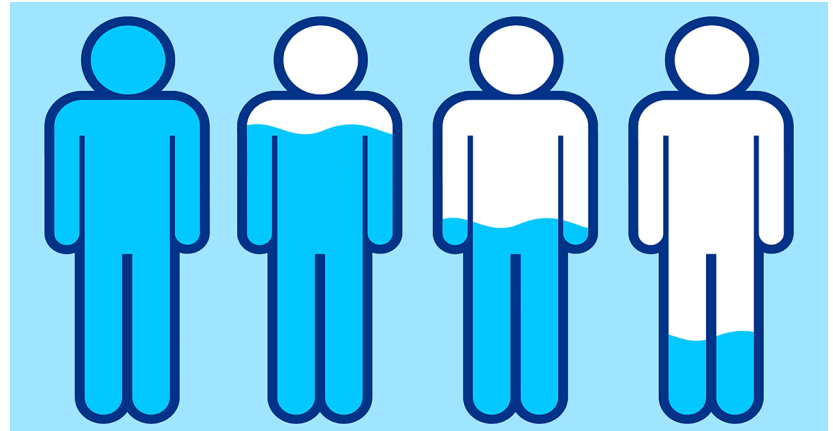
Increasing Calories and Nutrition

- Examples:
- Mashed potatoes:
Add butter, cream, and cheese
- Oatmeal:
Add peanut butter and banana
- Smoothies:
Add yogurt, protein powder, and fruit



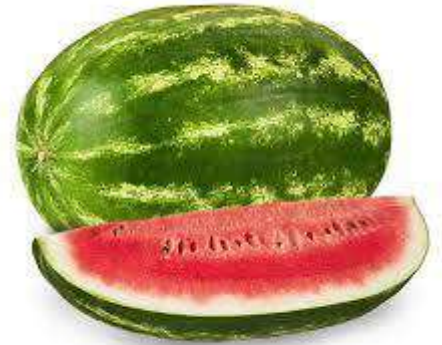
Hydration – The most common nutrition risk

- Many individuals with dementia lose their thirst sensation.
- Signs of Dehydration:
 - Increased confusion
 - Fatigue
 - Dizziness
 - Dry mouth
 - Dark urine
 - Constipation
 - Increased falls



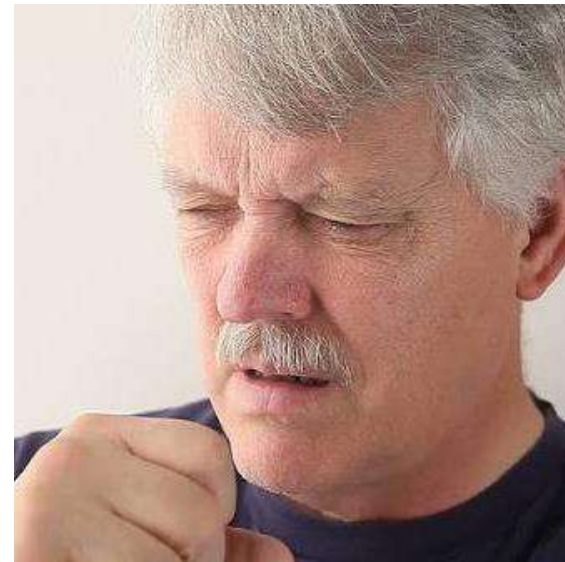
Creative Hydration Ideas

- Watermelon
- Popsicles
- Fruit-infused water
- Soup
- Broth
- Jell-O
- Herbal tea
- Smoothies
- Offer fluids every 1–2 hours rather than waiting for meals.



Swallowing Concerns

- Warning Signs:
 - Coughing during meals
 - Wet or gurgly voice
 - Pocketing food
 - Frequent throat clearing
 - Recurrent pneumonia
 - Weight loss
- When these signs appear, notify healthcare providers and request a swallowing evaluation.



Maintaining Dignity

- Caregivers often focus on how much was eaten.
- Instead focus on:
 - Comfort
 - Enjoyment
 - Social connection
 - Positive experiences
- Remember:
 - A successful meal is not measured only by calories consumed.
 - A successful meal is one where the person feels respected, comfortable, and connected.



Interactive Activity

Which meal would be easiest for someone living with dementia to eat?



Large crowded plate



Simple colorful
plated meal



Finger-food meal



Take-Home: 15 Dementia Mealtime Tips



- Keep meals on a routine schedule.
- Reduce distractions.
- Offer simple choices.
- Serve familiar foods.
- Use colorful plates.
- Encourage independence.
- Offer finger food when needed.
- Provide small frequent meals.
- Watch for swallowing changes.
- Promote hydration all day.
- Avoid arguing about food.
- Focus on comfort and enjoyment.
- Respect lifelong food preferences.
- Be patient and flexible.
- Celebrate small successes.



"Food is more than nutrition. It is comfort, connection, culture, memory, and dignity."



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Other Considerations...

- **Offer simple choices.** Ask close-ended questions - “Would you like chicken or pasta?”
- **Allow plenty of time.**
- **Make food easy to manage.** If utensils are difficult, consider finger foods.
- **Provide cues when needed.**
- **Encourage independence.**
- **Eat together when possible.**



- Real-Life Mealtime Coaching Examples
- Scenario 1:
"I already ate."
- Do not argue.
- Try:
"Let's have a little snack together."
- Offer:
 - Smoothie
 - Half sandwich
 - Fruit cup
 - Cheese and crackers
- Scenario 2:
Refuses dinner.
- Possible reasons:
 - Fatigue
 - Pain
 - Constipation
 - Food not appealing
 - Portion too large
- Try:
 - Smaller plate
 - Favorite food
 - Different meal time
- Scenario 3:
Only wants sweets.
- Instead of fighting the preference:
- Provide nutrient-rich options:
 - Greek yogurt parfait
 - Banana peanut butter smoothie
 - Rice pudding
 - Custard
 - Protein pudding
 - Fruit with yogurt
- Calories and hydration may be more important than strict meal balance.
- Scenario 4:
Forgets how to use utensils.
- Serve:
 - Chicken strips
 - Sandwich quarters
 - Fruit slices
 - Soft vegetables
 - Mini quiches
 - Breakfast muffins
- Finger foods can dramatically improve intake.



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Thank you for coming!