As dementia progresses, there may be changes in a person's eating habits and ability to eat. There may be changes in taste, ability to swallow or appetite (increase or decrease). Try to aim for a healthy diet, taking into account a person's likes and dislikes, to provide all the nutrients the body needs.

**Constipation**
Many older people have a problem with constipation. They should have:
- Fluid: 8 – 10 cups a day is recommended. Gentle reminders and prompts to drink may help.
- Fibre: try wholemeal bread, wholegrain breakfast cereals, pulses
- Physical activity

**Anemia**
Folate-deficiency anaemia is common in dementia. Fruits, vegetables, liver, fortified breakfast cereals, fortified bread and yeast extract are useful sources. Iron deficiency anaemia can be avoided by including iron rich foods in the diet. Red meat, oily fish, kidney, fortified bread/cereals, beans, lentils.

**Swallowing difficulties**
Any swallowing difficulty needs to be investigated. Ask a Doctor about a referral to a Speech and Language Therapist (SALT). The SALT may recommend a texture modified diet and/or thickened fluids.

**Mouth problems**
Dementia can make it difficult to manage dentures and/or maintain oral hygiene. Using a small-headed toothbrush after meals may help. If someone has lost weight, dentures may no longer fit. Mouth infections make it difficult to eat and drink.

**Visuoperceptual difficulties in dementia**
People with dementia experience a number of visuoperceptual difficulties due to normal ageing, eye conditions, additional damage to the visual system caused by dementia and medications. Specific difficulties that have been reported include colour perception and object recognition. Using highly visible red cups and plates led to an increase in food and drink consumption.

**Obesity**
Some people with dementia gain excess weight. Encourage a healthy weight with small, regular meals and plenty of low calorie drinks/snacks between meals.

**Weight loss**
A person with dementia may develop a poor appetite or lose interest in food. This can cause weight loss and a dip in their overall well-being. A poor appetite may develop for numerous reasons - a change in food preferences, difficulties chewing and swallowing, co-ordination problems affecting eating and drinking, damage to brain caused by dementia, constipation or depression.

**Supporting a person with dementia to eat and drink**
- Meals should be relaxed and unhurried
- Minimise distractions
- Offer food/drink when the person is calm and not anxious
- Ensure that they are alert, comfortable and sitting upright before offering food and drink
- If the person appears to have difficulty using cutlery - prompt the person and guide their hand to their mouth
- If a person is struggling to use cutlery to eat, offer finger foods.

**Finger Foods**
Offering finger foods can improve nutritional intake, and help maintain independence especially for people who like to walk about at mealtimes. Try to offer the type of food the person likes, at the times and in the place they are most likely to eat.

### Breads and cereals
- Buttered toast or bread fingers
- Small bread rolls with butter
- Sandwiches
- Chapattis or small pitta breads
- Buttered crumpets or muffins
- Crackers with butter and soft cheese
- Biscuits
- Scones, malt loaf, fruit loaf, teacakes
- Slices of gingerbread or fruit cake
- Waffles
- Soft cereal bars
- Toast and pâté

### Meat, fish and alternatives
- Meat sliced and cut into pieces
- Chicken breast (moist) cut into pieces
- Hamburgers, meatballs
- Sausages, chipolatas, hotdogs
- Fish fingers, crabsticks
- Slices of pork pie
- Veggie burgers or veggie sausages
- Slices of quiche, pizza, cheese on toast
- Hard-boiled eggs, quartered
- Cheese cubes
- Kebabs
- Peanut-butter sandwich
- Hummus sandwich

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**Dementia and Food**

This dietary advice sheet gives some general information to help you make the recommended changes to your diet. If you need more detailed advice, or if you are following a special diet that makes it difficult to make these changes, please ask your doctor to refer you to a registered dietitian.
### Finger Foods (Cont’d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Vegetables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slices of apple or pear</td>
<td>Broccoli florets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melon wedges</td>
<td>Cauliflower florets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pineapple chunks or rings</td>
<td>Carrot, swede or parsnip cut into sticks or cubes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange segments</td>
<td>Brussels sprouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slices of kiwi fruit</td>
<td>Green beans or mange tout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strawberries or raspberries</td>
<td>Cucumber slices or sticks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apricots (stone removed) halved</td>
<td>Celery sticks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nectarines or peaches (stone removed) sliced</td>
<td>Cherry tomatoes or salad tomatoes cut into wedges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seedless grapes</td>
<td>Courgette slices or sticks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bananas (whole or sliced)</td>
<td>Sliced peppers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mushrooms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dried fruit</th>
<th>Potatoes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ready-to-eat apricots, pears, apple rings or stoned prunes</td>
<td>Potato (or sweet potato) wedges or chunky chips, oven baked or fried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Small roast potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boiled potatoes, whole or halved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plantain slices or cubes, fried</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sample Menu – meals in company with others can be a useful cue to remind about eating

#### Breakfast
- Buttered toast fingers with yeast extract / Dried apricots / vegetable sticks or cubes
- Jam / marmalade
- Glass of fruit juice

#### Mid afternoon
- Dried apricots / vegetable sticks or cubes

#### Mid morning
- Soft cereal bar

#### Light meal
- Sardine sandwich
- Cherry tomatoes
- Slice of fruit cake

#### Main meal
- Fish fingers
- Potato wedges
- Carrot sticks

#### Evening snack
- Individual fruit pie / chunky fruit salad
- All milk drink or smoothie

(Plus 8 – 10 cups of fluid each day)

### Useful resources

#### Eating well supporting older people and older people with dementia
- Published by: Caroline Walker Trust

#### Food for thought booklets
- Printed by: Alzheimer’s Society, Gordon House, 10 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1PH
- Email: info@alzheimers.org.uk
- www.alzheimers.org.uk

#### Alzheimer’s Society guide to catering for people with dementia
- Author: Gwen Coleman
- Printed by: Alzheimer’s Society, Gordon House, 10 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1PH
- Tel: 020 7306 0606
- Email: info@alzheimers.org.uk
- www.alzheimers.org.uk

#### Patient Information Leaflets
- Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, Norfolk & Norwich University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- Email: www.heron.nhs.uk