

Eating as we age

Hints and tips for
keeping healthy
and hydrated in
older age



For family carers

Welcome



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About this book

Jon's introduction



People experience various problems with eating and drinking, but no matter what age or your current eating habits, it's never too late to change your diet and improve the way you feel. A healthy, balanced diet can boost our energy levels, keep our bones strong and help sharpen the mind.

Not eating enough can lead to weight loss and other problems including vulnerability to infection, reduced muscle strength and fatigue. Similarly, people living with dementia may overeat, because they have forgotten that they have recently eaten or are concerned about where the next meal is coming from. Whatever issue a person is facing, it can be a stressful situation for everyone involved.

Our sense of smell and taste can also change as we age, affecting our appetite and enjoyment of food.

Eating as we age has been created to help anyone who experiences problems with eating or drinking, or those caring for an older friend or relative. We've worked with colleagues from across Care UK to bring together hints and tips, which we hope family carers will be able to put into practice at home.

You'll find top tips on encouraging those with a diminished appetite to eat, making every mouthful count, and advice on how to create an environment that supports older people to dine with dignity.

If you would like further information on any of the topics covered, the catering teams in all our homes would be happy to help – simply contact your nearest care home.

Do remember that this guide is no substitute for professional medical advice. If you are worried about your own food and drink intake, or that of a friend, neighbour or loved-one, talk to a GP who will be able to make specific recommendations.

Jon Bicknell
Food and services director, Care UK

“I am extremely happy with the level of care my mother is getting at Cedrus House... My mum was very underweight when she went into Cedrus House but the staff have spent a lot of time with her and got her weight back up again.”

A relative of a resident

Signs of under nutrition

- Weight loss
- Loose fitting clothes and jewellery
- Ill-fitting dentures
- Tiredness
- Sores around lips
- Hair loss

Please note that losing weight, having a reduced appetite or being dehydrated are not always normal signs of ageing. Speak to a GP if you, or the person you care for, are eating less than normal or showing any signs of under nutrition or dehydration.

Recipe inspiration: Parsnip and ginger cake

**Courtesy of Andrew Mussett,
Regional head chef, Care UK**

Ingredients

250g butter, softened
250g soft brown sugar
4 medium eggs and top this up to 250g
with a little milk, beaten
250g self-raising flour
2 teaspoons ground ginger
250g parsnips, peeled and grated

Method:

1. Preheat the oven to 170°C and grease and line an 8 inch round cake tin.
2. Beat the butter together with the sugar until soft and creamy.

3. Add the eggs and milk, flour and ginger beating to combine, only for a minute.
4. Fold in the grated parsnips.
5. Bake for about 1 hour 15 minutes.
6. When cooked allow the cake to cool in the tin.
7. Remove from the tin and slather over your topping of choice. Serve the cake with some whipped double cream and a spoonful of ginger curd. Alternatively, a spoonful of ginger curd could be added to a cream cheese frosting made with 75g cream cheese beaten together with 175g icing sugar.



The strong flavour of ginger can be tasted and smelled easier by failing taste buds. Parsnips are also a very interesting vegetable - they contain more sugar than carrots or turnips - in fact the percentage of sugar in a parsnip is comparable to that in grapes and bananas. They also contain both soluble and insoluble fibre which is good for digestion and aids the removal of cholesterol. Parsnips are also packed full of vitamins and minerals.

Chapter one

Stimulating appetite



One of the most common problems older people and their carers face when it comes to diet and nourishment is loss of appetite.

Appetites diminish as we age for many reasons – a reduced sense of taste and smell, decreased physical exercise, medication, health conditions, or the lack of motivation to cook.

Speak to a GP to see if there are any underlying causes for the loss of appetite and, if the doctor is confident that there are no major health issues, you can focus your energies on stimulating your appetite.

If you are a carer, there are many ways to encourage people who have lost interest in food to eat. We spoke to colleagues in our homes and have summarised their appetite activation advice into 20 tips, ideal for family carers who are concerned about the health and well-being of their ageing friends and family.





20 tips for stimulating appetite as we age

1 Try serving smaller meals, more often.

For many older people, six small meals in a day is easier to digest, and a less daunting prospect, than three larger ones. "Perhaps have the dessert in the middle of the afternoon instead of immediately after lunch. Try cheese and crackers or a bowl of fruit mid-morning."

Andrew Mussett,
Hotel Services Manager, Care UK



2 Consider insomn-eating.

Many people don't sleep as well as they grow older, so have snacks available at night too. "A person living with dementia can sometimes be 'out of sync' with the time, so often their eating patterns can be unusual. We have snacks available during the night so that residents can help themselves when they are hungry. We make sure there are jacket potatoes and soup that can be easily reheated should something more substantial be needed."

Home manager, Care UK

3 Encourage impulse eating.

Leave food out on tables, or snack stations, so that your loved one can eat when they want to, rather than just at set meal times.

4 Try to understand that our food tastes change as we age

and try cooking something new and different. Many older people will find themselves enjoying curries, chilli con carne or fajitas when they had never liked these meals before.



5 Enhance the flavour of the food you serve, without loading it with sugar and salt. **Try**

herbs and spices like mint, rosemary, cinnamon or paprika, or seasoning your meals with fresh lemon or lime.



6 **Bring some colour to mealtimes.** The more visually appealing a plate of food or snack table is, the more a person will be drawn to it. Grapes, satsumas, bananas and tomatoes will stand out much more than sandwiches and crisps – and provide more vitamins and minerals.

7 **Smaller portions for smaller appetites.** Don't overload the plate as that can be off-putting to someone who has gone off their food, for whatever reason. A smaller plate doesn't mean that people will eat more – and it's a bit undignified for people to have a different size plate to those eating around them. Give everyone the same sized plate but put less on the one for the person who is struggling with their appetite.



8 **Variety doesn't have to be the spice of life.** If your loved one will only eat two or three dishes, go with it and serve those on rotation. Cook in bulk and defrost them as they are needed – this will save you precious time too.





9 Encourage a liquid lunch. If your loved one doesn't want to eat, try preparing a nutritious smoothie or calorie-laden milkshake. These will work wonders as an occasional meal replacement. For the base of a fruit smoothie always add half a banana and full fat greek yoghurt to increase the calorific value.

10 "Don't clock watch. If the person you are caring for wants rice pudding for breakfast and a bacon sandwich for dinner, let them have it. Time perceptions can change as you grow older – especially for those living with dementia. Remember that eating nutritious food is the important thing, not the time of day it is consumed."



**Head of nursing,
care and dementia services, Care UK**

11 Try finger food. Sometimes older people, especially those living with dementia, don't have the energy or inclination to tackle a plate of food with a knife and fork. Fish goujons with tartare sauce; tempura chicken with a sweet and sour dip; homemade apple, paprika and sausage rolls; quiche and meatballs are all delicious and wholesome hot snacks that can replace a warm, plated meal all year round.

12

**Abandon the
no clean plate,
no dessert rule.**

It is better that your loved one eats something sweet than nothing at all. Crumbles, bananas and custard, meringues with fresh berries, and pancakes with fruit are all examples of puddings that still have some nutritional value and could work well on your weekly meal planner. Remember to talk to a clinician first if your loved one is diabetic or on a low sugar diet.



13

Keep it warm.

If food goes cold, it will lose its appeal. If the person you are caring for tends to eat slowly, consider serving half portions at a time, or using the microwave to reheat food (remember, never reheat food more than once and ensure it is piping hot when removed from the oven and then left to cool slightly).



14

Make life easy for the person you are caring for.

Try serving food on a plate with a higher rim, like a pasta bowl, and ensure they have their reading glasses with them at meal times so they can see the food you have put in front of them.



15

Involve your loved one in the preparation of meals.

The sights and smells of food being prepared can help to stimulate even the smallest of appetites. "Colleagues on the night shift often make bread in a bread maker overnight and leave in the kitchenettes. When residents wake in the morning the wonderful scents of the freshly baked bread helps to encourage residents to start the day off with a hearty breakfast. A coffee percolator will have the same effect."

Home manager, Care UK

16 **Don't let your loved one eat alone.** If you tend to dine with the person you care for, and they see you enjoy your food, they will be far more inclined to eat theirs too.

17 **Have a TV dinner.**

Research

shows that we are less aware of what we are eating if we are doing something else at the same time, like watching TV. You may find that your loved one eats more if they are distracted, so try dinner on a tray in the lounge and see what effect that has on the appetite of the person you are caring for.



18 **Try getting a small amount of fresh air** before meals as this can help stimulate an appetite.



19 Make sure you are serving meals in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. **Playing soft music** has also been shown to help.



20 **See the person not the job.** Encouraging loved ones to eat a meal can become task orientated in that you are eager to fulfil the task of getting mum or dad to eat three square meals a day. This isn't necessarily an achievable goal, so the approach to mealtimes needs to change depending on the lifestyle and needs of each individual. It is better that they enjoy half a plate of food, take their time and eat with others at the table so that it becomes an enjoyable experience.

Chapter two

Super snacking





If you are caring for someone with a reduced appetite, or looking after yourself, it is essential to include snacks in between meals, especially if you (or your loved-one) are only managing small dishes.

Ten Tuck Tips - packed full of calories for those in need of building up



1. Glass of fortified milk with a biscuit or cake
2. Crumpets, tea cake, scones with cream (add butter, jam and chocolate spread)
3. Crackers with spreading cheese or cream cheese
4. 3-4 rice cakes
5. Small chocolate bar or mini bag of sweets
6. Individual desserts such as chocolate mousse, yoghurts, trifles, rice pudding and ice cream (choose full fat varieties or add a 40ml cream shot to add an extra 250 calories)
7. Dried fruit, nuts and seeds or flapjack
8. Breakfast cereal or porridge with enriched milk, cream or sugar
9. Sausage roll, pork pie or pasties
10. Slice of pizza, dough balls with dip and crisps



“The Tiptree box is an award-winning concept devised by two nurses at Colchester General Hospital. The box contains familiar items which can be placed on a table where patients have a safe place to sit, eat and drink. The tablecloth used on the table is deliberately coloured red as it has been known to stimulate appetite. So, if you are a home carer, consider adapting this and creating a snack table of your

own. Fill it with individually wrapped biscuits, colourful fruit, bowls of sweets and boxes of raisins. You can also add items such as old photographs, coins and dusters. Make it as visual as possible and leave it somewhere prominent in your home. It could make all the difference to your loved one and meeting their nutritional needs.”

Andrew Mussett,
Hotel Services Manager, Care UK



Chapter three

Fortifying food



If, after trying all of our tips in Chapter Two, you or your loved one are still not eating enough, there are ways to increase calorie intake without increasing the volume of food being consumed. Called 'food fortification', it is the adding of high energy foods to meals.

Tips for food fortification

- Add butter, margarine and grated cheese to mashed potatoes, or any vegetables (an extra teaspoon of butter and one tablespoon of double cream increases calorie intake by 260%). For something a little more daring try sliced potatoes in garlic and cream or stock, sautéed potatoes or crushed new potatoes with butter and fresh herbs.
- Add extra ice-cream, single or double cream or custard to stewed and tinned fruit, or serve with cakes and pies, or use to create a thick fruit shake (recipe on page 24).
- Add grated cheese to dishes such as soups, pasta dishes or scrambled eggs on toast.
- Spread thick margarine or butter on bread, rolls, wraps or scones.
- Add butter, milk and cream to soups, stews, casseroles and curries. Don't forget the dumplings with stews and casseroles!
- Add dried fruit or a banana to porridge, along with cream, milk and sugar, honey or jam on top.
- Be generous with salad dressings such as mayonnaise and salad cream.
- Serve meat and fish with rich creamy sauces like white, parsley or cheese sauce.
- To make a rich and creamy rice pudding, add one heaped tablespoon of dried skimmed milk powder, two tablespoons of double cream and two teaspoons of jam. The calorie intake increases by 313%.



Top Tip

“If someone has a sweet tooth and is looking for a high calorie yet nutritious snack, oil-based muffins are really easy to make and keep fresh for longer. There are lots of recipes out there, just add the dried fruit of your choice.”

Head chef at Care UK

Always speak to a doctor or dietician before fortifying foods – especially if you, or the person you are caring for, lives with a medical condition such as raised cholesterol or diabetes.

Did you know?



You can buy many fortified foods from any supermarket or convenience store. Manufacturers have to add specific vitamins and minerals to certain products by law – such as margarine and bread. Many breakfast cereals also have vitamins and minerals added, such as iron, vitamin B and calcium.

If you are worried about your loved one missing out on vital vitamins and minerals, speak to a GP or dietician who will be able to recommend specific supplements based on a food diary and medical review. You can also speak to your pharmacist about an over-the-counter product, such as Complan.

Recipe inspiration: Beetroot thick shake

Ingredients

- 1 pint single or double cream
- 1 carton of cranberry juice
- 150g of sliced beetroot (from a jar)
- 250g icing sugar (to bring out sweetness)
- Vanilla ice cream

Method

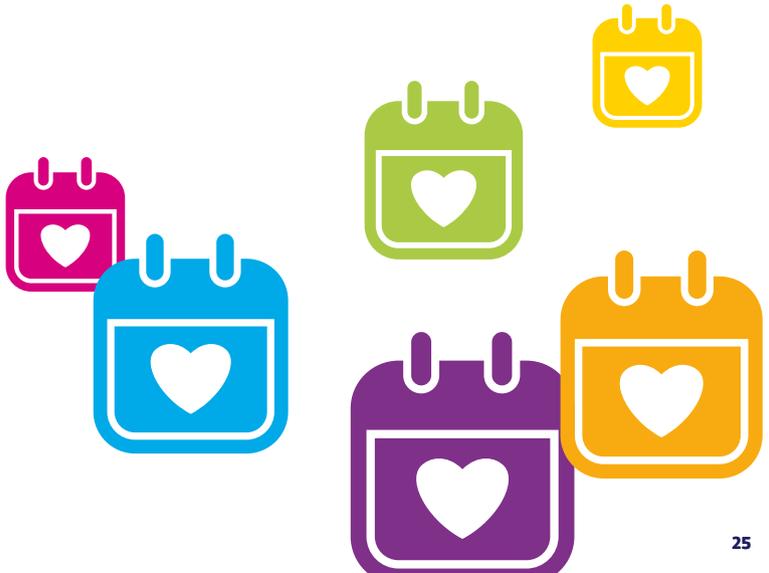
Combine all the ingredients into a blender and blitz until smooth. If the consistency is too thick, just add more cranberry juice.

“Did you know, using beetroot juice in dishes will help the calories to reach the bloodstream quicker? A glass of the beetroot shake will provide 300-400 calories so it’s a great way to stabilise someone’s weight if they’ve been unable to eat at mealtimes. You could add anything to the shake such as leftover rhubarb crumble, anything that will increase its calorific value. Thick shakes with fresh fruit are just as good, simply add to the basic ingredients.”



Chapter four

Changing tastes and needs as we age



Our body goes through many changes as we age. Our sense of taste, sight and smell can alter and this will affect our appetite and enjoyment of food. A reduced sense of taste may tempt us to add more salt to our meals for flavour, which could lead to high blood pressure putting us at increased risk of heart disease and stroke.

Our body's ability to absorb some key nutrients also becomes less efficient, making it harder for us to get all the nutrients we need for good health. Our body composition changes too. We lose muscle and gain fat tissue which causes our energy needs to drop. Most of us also become less active as we age. If we are burning fewer calories but haven't changed our diet, we will gain weight

which will in turn affect our health. Hormonal changes also mean that we are more likely to store fat around our middle, increasing the risk of conditions such as type 2 diabetes.

Recognising these changes and adapting to them is important when it comes to eating as we age.





Sensible salt intake

“Study food labels to identify foods which are high in salt (referred to as sodium on the nutritional labels on the back of packs). Bacon, cheese, pickles, smoked fish, anchovies, soy sauce, bottled sauces, gravy, stock cubes, deli meats, and food canned in brine are all high in salt. Opt for smaller portions of high salt foods and don’t eat them too often. In addition, choose salt-reduced products wherever possible.”

www.nutrition.org

Herbs and lemon or lime can add flavour to a dish so try using those instead of salt when you are cooking from fresh. Don’t put the salt shaker on the table either. That will help to remove any temptation.

Making every mouthful count

Be aware that the body doesn’t absorb vitamins and minerals as efficiently as we age, and lack of iron can lead to anaemia. So, don’t serve tea, coffee or fizzy drinks at meal times. Caffeine affects the body’s ability to absorb iron. Instead serve orange juice – the vitamins in the oranges will help the body to absorb as much iron as possible.



Fibre and fluid

Digestive problems like constipation, piles and diverticular disease are more common as we age. Drinking lots of fluid will help with this, as will light exercise – even walking or yoga can reduce stress and anxiety levels which can contribute to constipation. A high fibre diet is also essential – oats, lentils, beans, wholegrain cereals, fresh fruit, dried fruit, corn (including popcorn) are all great for maintaining a healthy bowel function.

For someone with a sweet tooth

"If your loved one craves sweet food and you are worried about weight gain, try fruit as a healthier option. If the person you are caring for will only eat sweet food, you can add small amounts of sugar or honey to their savoury food or serve sides of sweet sauces and chutney. We find that very effective."

Head chef at Care UK



Changing tastes

Remember that many people experience an altered sense of taste as they age. Offer a variety of foods and try things with an intense flavour – sweet and sour chicken, tomato and garlic sauce, Thai green curries for example. You could try adding lavender to lemonade (turns purple too) or adding fresh basil to any drink to stimulate the body and the mind.

Soft food diets

It is estimated that dysphagia – difficulty in swallowing – affects around 8% of people around the world with the very young and old most frequently affected.

Caused by a range of conditions – strokes, old age, dementia, Parkinson's disease and MS – dysphagia is generally diagnosed by speech and language therapists.

Unfortunately, people living with the condition are generally at greater risk of malnutrition, dehydration, pneumonia and choking. Anxiety, loss of taste and smell, and embarrassment can cause those living with dysphagia to reject their food, meaning carers have to work harder than ever to serve nutritious, appetising and safe meals – crucial when it comes to maintaining their loved one's well-being and quality of life.

If you are a home carer, your medical team will give you tailored advice to help your loved one – starting with the type of dysphagia diet you need to follow. This could be fork mashable, pre-mashed, thick purée or thin purée.

Whatever your clinician recommends, don't panic. There are still lots of dishes that you can serve and plenty of things you can do to keep the food both tempting and tasty.

For the national descriptors of soft food diets visit the National Association of Care Catering website, nacc.co.uk. For help with recipes, there are a range of dysphagia cookbooks on the market to choose from.



Recipe inspiration: Lime and coriander salmon fishcakes

Ingredients

450g floury potatoes, cut into chunks
350g salmon (about 3 fillets)
2 tsp sweet chilli sauce
zest ½ lime, plus wedges to serve
1 tablespoon lime juice
½ bunch of chopped coriander
3 tbspl plain flour
1 egg, beaten
100g dried breadcrumbs
4 tbspl sunflower oil

Method

1. Heat the grill. Place the potatoes in a pan of water, bring to the boil, cover and cook for 12-15 mins until tender.
2. Drain and leave to steam-dry, then mash. Meanwhile, season the salmon and grill for 5-6 mins until just cooked. Cool for a few minutes then break into large flakes.
3. Mix the potato, chilli sauce, lime juice, zest, coriander and some salt and pepper.

4. Lightly mix in the salmon, taking care not to break it up too much. Shape into 4 large fish cakes.
5. Put the flour, egg and breadcrumbs in 3 shallow dishes. Dip the cakes into the flour, dust off any excess, then dip in the egg, and finally coat in breadcrumbs.
6. Heat the oil in a large pan. Fry the cakes over a medium-low heat for 3-4 mins each side until deep golden and heated through.
7. Serve with salad or vegetables of your choice.

Not only are these fishcakes packed full of flavour but they are also full of essential fatty acids that are good for brain function. They are also soft on the palette making them easier to eat.



Chapter five

Hydration



Signs of dehydration

- Dark coloured urine (should be straw coloured)
- Dry mouth
- Dry skin
- Loss of appetite
- Light headedness or headaches
- Muscle cramps in arms, legs or stomach
- Mild confusion
- Sleep problems

Anyone experiencing these symptoms should rest in a cool place, out of the sun and drink plenty of fluids. Contact a GP if symptoms persist or worsen.

As we grow older, our kidneys become less effective. Whereas drinking a pint of water in our twenties would have had an almost immediate hydrating effect, the same is not true for someone in their eighties. Our bodies are simply not as good at conserving water as we age, making it easier for us to become dehydrated.

There are other issues to contend with too. It's thought that age and dementia



affect the body's ability to feel thirst, so the person forgets to drink. Some older people also avoid drinking later in the day so that they do not have to get up so often in the night, whilst some with incontinence drink little, in the hope of preventing the condition.

However old you are, and whatever medical conditions you are living with, drinking one and a half litres of water (6-8 glasses) or non-caffeine or non-alcoholic drinks a day is vital in ensuring that the bladder and urinary tract function properly.

The importance of helping older people to stay hydrated cannot be underestimated. There are plenty of ways to ensure you or your loved one drinks enough – here is our top ten.

1 **Serve a drink with every meal and snack.**

If your loved one has a favourite cup or glass, remember to use that one as often as you can.



2 **Use a clear glass,**

so that you can see what is inside, or put it in their line of sight. Straws will also often help to boost fluid consumption.

3 **Sit with the person**

whilst they eat and keep reminding them to take a sip.



4 **Always monitor the amount of fluid**

that the person you care for is drinking. Use a jug that has a measure down the side or, for those who are not able to leave their bed, invest in a bottle with a measure. These also come with straws.

5 **Offer a variety of drinks**

– hot and cold, still and fizzy. Water is a great choice but milk, tea, coffee, fruit juice and soft drinks all count.



6 **“Make drinks look as appealing as possible**

– like jugs of cold water with a slice of lemon, cordials served in vintage jugs, or mocktails with all the trimmings. Adding mint will also give off a lovely fragrance and it helps with digestion.”

Home Manager, Care UK

7 **Make an occasion of a drink**

– share a tea break or invite a neighbour round for afternoon drinks.

8 **Serve foods that are high in fluid** – fruit, vegetables, salad, gravy, jelly and ice cream

Did you know? Fruits such as pineapple, cranberries, oranges and raspberries all contain 80-90% water and are packed with health-boosting vitamins such as vitamin C – essential for warding off coughs and colds.

“In the winter, think about soups, stews and casseroles with plenty of gravy and mashed potato to soak it all up.”

Head chef at Care UK

9 **“For hot summer days we always make our own healthy ice lollies**

by freezing drinks or even yoghurts onto sticks using moulds. They are really easy to make and the perfect way to hydrate the body. Watermelon is a great option, simply blitz with a hand blender and mix with coconut water, it’s hydrating and rich in vitamin C.”

Home manager, Care UK



10 **Try a mug of Horlicks or even hot chocolate.**

These not only hydrate your loved one; they also contain high levels of carbohydrate so will give them an energy boost too.

“According to research by the National Association of Care Catering, placing pictures of water droplets on the tables and walls of dining areas (or even in bedrooms) will subconsciously trigger the thirst mechanism. This is a cheap and easy tactic that anyone can implement at home if they are worried about how much fluid their loved one is consuming.”

Andrew Mussett,
Hotel Services Manager, Care UK



Case study: Appleby House's hydration stations

Appleby House was looking for new ways to make sure residents kept hydrated, and after much research started using Bolero hydration stations in April 2015. Shona Bradbury, home manager at Appleby House in Epsom explains;

"We really liked the idea of the vitamin C in the drinks and the huge choice of flavours we could offer residents. Being sugar-free also meant residents with diabetes could enjoy them without concern. The colour and flavour was also a deciding factor as the drinks became more appealing to residents living with dementia.

The drinks came in sachets and were initially made up in jugs mixed with water. We immediately observed fluid levels increase, in some cases double, and within four weeks, urinary tract infections dropped from an average of 17 infections a month to four.

In hot weather the jugs were being replenished two to three times a day, an indication just how much fluid residents were consuming. The hydration stations



look fantastic and the noise and colour of them make you want to have a drink.

There are a range of sugar free drink sachets on the market that can be mixed with tap, soda or sparkling water to make a refreshing fruit drink that's bursting with vitamin C, and sugar-free. They are available in family size as well as on-the-go sachets, they're convenient to carry and easy to mix. Just search online for 'sugar-free fruit drinks'."



Chapter six

Dining with dignity



The environment plays a huge part in someone's eating and drinking experience. It can affect how much a person enjoys eating – and therefore the amount they eat. In fact, a good mealtime experience can have a hugely positive effect on someone's overall health and wellbeing.

The most important meal of the day

Take a fresh look at the breakfast table and see how accessible items are. Make it easy for your loved one, if they are living with dementia, to prepare food for themselves. Decant small amounts of butter, jam and marmalade into ramekins. Put

individual servings of milk into jugs and encourage them to spread their own toast and pour their own bowls of cereal. Preserving independence is so important especially for someone living with dementia.





Self-serve

Support a loved one to maintain control over their meals by giving them their own jugs of gravy and custard. Let them do the pouring. Similarly, encourage them to serve their own vegetables from serving dishes.

Time for tea

“When making tea, assess whether someone is able to pour their own tea, using a small tea pot and milk jug. For some people it may only be practical to add their own sugar – but anything that encourages independence is worthwhile.”

Home manager, Care UK



Take a different view

Helping a loved one to carry on being able to make their own drinks and snacks can be as simple as taking a new look at kitchen surroundings. Try clearing work surfaces of any clutter so that it is easy to find a mug and tea bags.



Keep it simple

Don't overwhelm someone living with dementia with too much choice and open-ended questions. For example, rather than saying “what would you like for breakfast?” ask “would you prefer some toast or some porridge this morning?” Better still, hold the options up as this will make choosing even easier.

For people living with dementia it is best to lay the table with only items that are familiar to them. If they are used to having a napkin or fresh flowers, for example, then carry on with this.

Specialist service

"Normal cutlery can be a challenge if you have limited movement or feeling in your hands. Special knives, forks and spoons with different shaped and chunkier handles are available from specialist suppliers. Plates should also have some depth to them to help people keep food on their plate and move the food around."

Jon Bicknell,
Food and services director, Care UK



Compare and contrast

Use a table cloth that contrasts with the plates. White-on-white blends, so someone living with dementia, or with weak eyesight, may not know where their plate ends and the cloth begins. Blue or bright yellow plates work best. The plate stands out - and the food does too as there are very few foods in these colours.

Watch the temperature

Some people living with dementia will lose the ability to judge the temperature of their food. As a carer, make sure that the food isn't too hot.



Background noise

"Some people enjoy eating with company; others prefer to eat on their own. This will vary from one meal to another. Either way, make sure that the person you are caring for has enough space.

"Also be aware that a noisy background can be distracting for someone living with dementia. The eating environment should be calm and relaxing. Switch off background noise."

The Alzheimer's Society

Make it social

The dining experience should be made into a social experience – sit, eat and talk with loved ones – this will encourage them to stay seated for longer and to continue to snack.



Chapter seven

Living with dementia





According to the Alzheimer's Society, over 980,000 people in the UK are now living with dementia – and somewhere between 20-50% of those don't eat enough of the right foods.

Here are our top ten tips for supporting people living with dementia to eat:

1

Set the scene

Your loved one will cope better with meal times if they know that they are coming. Let them see you preparing the food and laying the table just before serving – even better, involve them in the process.



“Try a breadmaker. The smell will make everyone feel hungry and signal that food is coming. The fresh, crusty bread could be served with butter, thereby increasing the calorific content of the meal too.”

Andrew Mussett,
Hotel Services Manager, Care UK

2

Don't dine alone

“Carers should sit down at the table with their loved one and eat with them. Social activity really helps to encourage eating.”

Home manager,
Care UK



3

Ensure they can see

If someone living with dementia can't see the food in front of them, they won't want to eat it. Bring your loved one's glasses to every meal and explain the dishes that you have served.





4 Make it easy

Finger foods can really help someone living with dementia. Your loved one might not have gone off their food, they might be just struggling with the process of eating, so make it as easy as you can for them.

5 Be aware

Remember that people living with dementia often have difficulties with chewing their food. They may forget to chew or hold food in their mouths. Raw carrots, sweetcorn and dry biscuits may be more difficult for your loved-one to chew or swallow so avoid these.

6 Lend a hand

People living with dementia often have problems with coordination. So, if your loved one is struggling with a knife and fork, cut the food up for them. Help to guide cutlery to their mouths too. Do whatever you can to make mealtimes as stress-free as possible for the person living with dementia.



7 Be patient

“Go at the pace that your loved one wants to go when it comes to mealtimes. Don't hurry them or show impatience. Make sure the portion you serve is small so that it doesn't go cold – but have extra available in the kitchen to reheat if they want more.”

Andrew Mussett,
Hotel Services Manager, Care UK

8 Choose your moment

Mealtimes should be an enjoyable experience that everyone looks forward to. If your loved one is agitated or distressed, wait. Offer food and drink when they are calmer and less anxious.



10 Cater to their tastes

People living with dementia may develop a particularly sweet or savoury tooth. If they will only eat crisps or sweets, this can lead to malnutrition. So, if your loved one has a sweet tooth, try adding honey when cooking carrots or parsnips; alternatively serve sauces such as apple, redcurrant or mint jelly on the side. You could even try baked or roast sweet potatoes for a change. For those who crave salty foods, try using lime juice. It liven up the food and is far more healthy – perfect for those with hypertension.

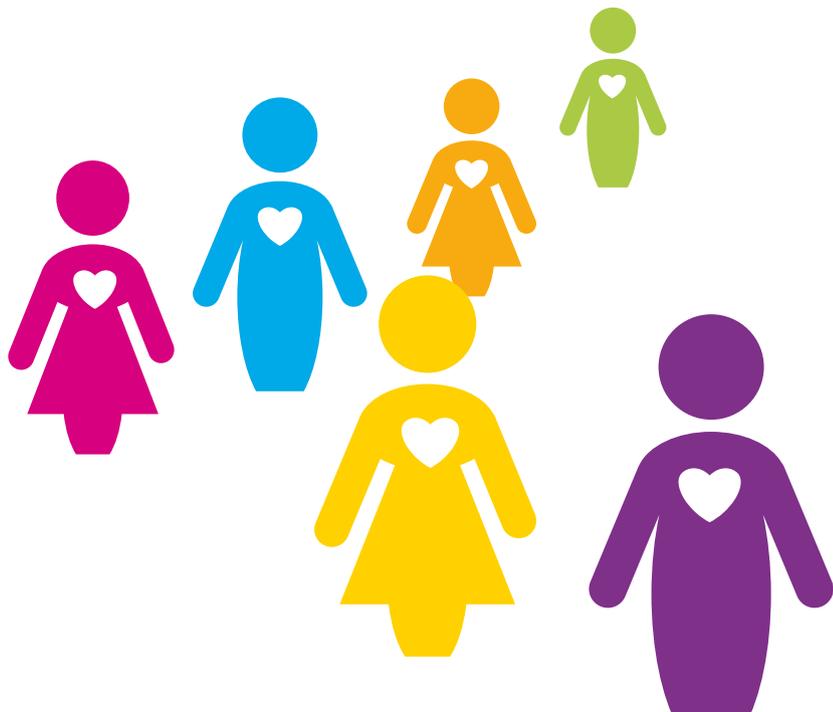
9 Routines and rituals

When we are supporting people to eat we tend to do it in the way we like to eat ourselves. Start by understanding how your loved one likes to eat, for example some people eat everything on the plate together, some people like to eat food groups separately. You can then support someone to eat in the way they would normally, and this will make it a more enjoyable experience for both of you.



Chapter eight

Living alone



As we age, many of us will find ourselves living alone for the first time in our lives.



Some people have to learn how to cook; others lose all motivation to prepare food when they no longer have a partner to cook for. Ill health and physical strength can also affect a person's desire or ability to follow a healthy, balanced diet.

If you are supporting an older parent, friend or neighbour who is living independently, there are many things that you can do to help them meet their nutritional needs.

1 Help your friend by planning a **menu for the week ahead**. This will save them money and will also help to make sure that they are getting a balanced diet over the course of seven days.



2 **Go for an easy life**
If your loved one is struggling to cook, aim for foods that are quick and simple to prepare. Vegetables don't have to be peeled and chopped from scratch – frozen and canned ones can be just as healthy (go for fruit in natural juice rather than syrup). Tinned fish is high in many essential nutrients and takes no cooking if added to salad or pasta.

Don't be afraid to buy ready meals. Just avoid low fat and healthy eating ones if your loved one is struggling to maintain weight. Keep the cupboard stocked with cans of soup too, especially 'cream of' and 'condensed' varieties.

3 Buy online

If you can't take your loved one shopping, get the shops to come to them. Arrange a weekly supermarket delivery or, if they are not comfortable with that, try a specialist delivery company such as Oakhouse Foods or Wiltshire Farm Foods, who will even put the food into the freezer for you.

4 Check cupboards and fridges

Rotting food, too



much of the same food, food stored in the wrong places and wrongly cooked food are all signs that your loved one might need more help around the home.

5 Cook in bulk

Whenever you cook a meal, double up on the ingredients and give your relative one dish to enjoy now and another for the freezer. Shepherd's pie, fish pie, beef stew and lasagne are all examples of food that freezes well.



6 Make the kitchen age friendly

If your relative is becoming less steady on their feet, move things from high cupboards to within easy reach. Consider a built-in wall oven so that your loved one doesn't have to bend down to cook and encourage them to sit down at the table to prepare their food.

7 Outside help

Try Meals on Wheels – a community-based service that provides fresh, nutritious meals directly to the homes of older people and people living with a disability. Carers will also take time to chat to your loved-one, often providing much needed company. Just remember that Meals on Wheels is designed to provide older people with only a third of their daily energy and protein needs. Contact your local council to see what is available in your area. It's also worth searching for lunch clubs or day care centres in your local area, many will provide home-cooked meals in facilities for older people.



Recipe inspiration: Beef stew with root vegetables and dumplings

Ingredients (serves 4 - 6)

2 tbsp olive oil
25g/1oz butter
750g/1lb 10oz beef stewing steak, chopped into bite-sized pieces
2 tbsp plain flour
2 garlic cloves, crushed
175g/6oz baby onions, peeled
150g/5oz celery, cut into large chunks
150g/5oz carrots, cut into large chunks
2 leeks, roughly chopped
200g/7oz swede, cut into large chunks
150ml/5fl oz red wine
500ml/18fl oz beef stock
2 fresh bay leaves
3 tbsp fresh thyme leaves
3 tbsp chopped fresh flat leaf parsley
Worcestershire sauce, to taste
Freshly ground black pepper

For the dumplings

125g/4½oz plain flour, plus extra for dusting
1 tsp baking powder
pinch salt
60g/2½oz suet
water, to make a dough
Creamy mashed potato to serve

Preparation method

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

1. For the beef stew, heat the oil and butter in an ovenproof casserole dish and fry the beef until browned on all sides.
2. Sprinkle over the flour and cook for a further 2-3 minutes.
3. Add the garlic and all the vegetables and fry for 1-2 minutes.
4. Stir in the wine, stock and herbs, then add the Worcestershire sauce to taste. Season with salt and freshly ground black pepper.
5. Cover with a lid, transfer to the oven and cook for about two hours, or until the meat is tender.

6. For the dumplings, sift the flour, baking powder and salt into a bowl. Add the suet and enough water to form a thick dough. With floured hands, roll spoonful's of the dough into small balls.
7. After two hours, remove the lid from the stew and place the dumplings on top.
8. Cover, return to the oven and cook for a further 20 minutes, or until the dumplings have swollen and are tender. If you prefer your dumplings with a golden top, leave the lid off when returning to the oven.
9. Serve, sprinkled with chopped parsley.

This warming beef stew is perfect for those colder evenings. It's an ideal meal to cook in bulk and to freeze and enjoy later. Add creamed mashed potato for extra calories.



Chapter nine

Food based activities



One of the very best ways to encourage someone with a small appetite to eat is to involve them in an activity with food at its heart.

From simply asking for their help in laying the table or peeling the vegetables, to going along to a tea dance, there is a long

list of events and activities that we lay on for residents at Care UK homes, and here are some of them for inspiration.

Lifestyle Lead, Care UK

‘We now have an avid group of growers at Priors House who love to impart their knowledge of the various fruit and vegetables we are growing on our ‘patch’. It is brilliant to see residents out

in our vegetable garden, getting their hands dirty! There is nothing better than picking a strawberry straight off the patch or sitting in a group and shucking peas that have been grown in our very own garden.





**Andrew Mussett,
Hotel Services Manager, Care UK**

“We have found that short activities involving food work best – like creating chocolate pizzas, decorating Easter eggs and making no-bake-fudge. Keep it quick and simple and you can have a lot of fun, and success, with a home-based food activity.

We lay on so many food based activities for residents. Anything nostalgic goes down especially well – the residents have a trip down memory lane and will often happily consume high calorie food without thinking twice about it.”



“Keep it quick and simple and you can have a lot of fun, and success, with a home-based food activity.”



Deputy Home Manager, Care UK

“Trips bring residents out of themselves. I would go as far to say that most people living with dementia are happier when they are out and about. So, why not combine an outing with a food based adventure – like a picnic in the park, fish and chips on the pier, popcorn and an old movie, or ice cream on the village green. The list is endless.”

Sources of advice and support



For more information about Care UK and our homes and services, visit our website [careuk.com/care-homes](https://www.careuk.com/care-homes).

Free guides

You will find a series of free guides to download, offering advice on caring for someone living with dementia, on respite care and advice on choosing a care home.

As Easy a ABC - A guide to keeping active and independent in older age.

[careuk.com/help-advice/keeping-active-and-independent](https://www.careuk.com/help-advice/keeping-active-and-independent)

Listen, Talk, Connect - Advice and tips to assist relatives, friends and carers to continue having meaningful conversations with anyone living with dementia.

[careuk.com/help-advice/listen-talk-connect-guide](https://www.careuk.com/help-advice/listen-talk-connect-guide)

Good to go - A guide to dementia friendly days out.

[careuk.com/help-advice/good-to-go-guide](https://www.careuk.com/help-advice/good-to-go-guide)

A helping hand - Advice and inspiration for families caring for an older loved one.

[careuk.com/help-advice/a-helping-hand-for-carers](https://www.careuk.com/help-advice/a-helping-hand-for-carers)

Please download your copies from our website or email RCSmarketing@careuk.com with your postal address for a free copy of these guides.

Local support

Many care homes will have links with local charities that support both people living with dementia and their carers – ask your nearest home for more information and contact details.

A number of our homes hold regular support sessions for family carers through their 'Friends of' groups, dementia cafés and drop-in sessions. All are welcome at these groups – please just ask your nearest home for more information.

For more information on funding your own care visit [careuk.com/care-homes/choosing-funding-care](https://www.careuk.com/care-homes/choosing-funding-care) or go directly to the Department of Health website for an explanation of personal health budgets at www.gov.uk

Other sources of advice and support

Health and social care professionals can offer information, advice and care to older people, including those living with dementia, and their carers. The services available and how they are organised vary by area, so to find out about what is available in your area, contact your local social services department or GP surgery.

Here are some other organisations that may be able to help.

Age UK

Age UK has been helping older people across the UK for more than 60 years.
ageuk.org.uk

Alzheimer Scotland

Specialist services for people with dementia and their carers.
alzscot.org

Alzheimer's Society

For information, advice and local services for those looking after someone living with dementia.
alzheimers.org.uk

Care Information Scotland

For information about care services for older people living in Scotland.
careinfoscotland.scot

Care Inspectorate Scotland

The independent body for care services in Scotland.
careinspectorate.com

Care Inspectorate Wales

The independent body for care services in Wales.
careinspectorate.wales

Care Quality Commission

The CQC is the health and social care regulator for England.
cqo.org.uk

Carers UK

Offers advice on benefits and services available to carers.
carersuk.org

Carers Trust

Information and local support services for carers.
carers.org

Dementia UK

Provides expert care and support to people living with and affected by dementia.

dementiauk.org

NHS Choices

Information and advice on a range of healthcare concerns, helping people to live well.

nhs.uk

Silver Line

Free confidential helpline providing advice to older people. Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 0800 470 8090.

thesilverline.org.uk

Information from the following resources has been used in this guide:

NHS Central London Community Healthcare – Food fortification guide

Carers UK and Nutricia – How can I help to improve the nutritional intake of a person I care for?

colchesterhospital.nhs.uk

Alzheimer’s Society

Healthcare Solutions – Dysphagia and Dementia (Premier Foods)

nutrition.org.uk

scie.org.uk

BBC Good Food – Eat your Age

myageingparent.com

Improve your food and drink intake - Age UK Salford and Salford Together

The risks of ignoring dysphagia are life-threatening - Care UK and Premier Foods
communityfoodandhealth.org (lunch clubs)

The Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust – Easy ways to boost calorie intake factsheet

With special thanks to our colleagues for their contributions and to the residents for sharing their stories.



Care UK
Connaught House
850 The Crescent
Colchester Business Park
Colchester
Essex CO4 9QB

careuk.com

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