

Heart of Tel Aviv Day Center

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Bon Appetite!

How to improve mealtimes



Why eating and meals are important?

Food supplies the body with energy and essential nutrients

Social importance: family, eating in company, communication.

Cultural importance: traditions, holidays.

Emotional: nice memories, pleasure, satisfaction.

Eating problems in dementia

Why? Changes in cognition, behavior and language.

Memory: person forgets to eat or forgets that he has already eaten.

Concentration: can't concentrate on eating.

Movement planning: has a hard time using utensils, opening the mouth, swallowing, chewing.

Visual and spatial perception: has a hard time placing utensils, recognizing food.

Language: can't express food preferences, pain or discomfort.

Results: Overeating or undereating and malnutrition

Different problems appear as the disease progresses.

Eating is a meaningful activity.

Eating is one of the central activities in which a person with dementia participates.

Cognitive, motor, communication abilities are used while in eating.

Why encourage independent eating?

The longer a person eats independently, the longer these abilities are preserved.

Independent eating and making choice improve quality of life, give a feeling of control and improve self-esteem.

Independent eating is safer!



+ General guidelines to enjoyable meals

Preserve the person's independence and encourage participation.

If the person is able to cut the food for himself, allow that! If he can help in the kitchen or make a hot drink, encourage him!



Helping during mealtime: sit beside the person and don't stand beside or behind him.



Putting on an apron:

Come from the front, do not surprise!

Explain what you are doing

If possible, allow the person to put the apron by himself.

Make sure that food temperature is appropriate



When the person is able to eat independently, but doesn't do it or does it slowly

In this case, do not hurry to feed the person. Try to give several cues:

1. Verbal cue. For example, explain what kind of food there is in the plate, show him and invite him to try.



3. Physical cue. If you start an action, the person might finish it by himself (for example, if you put a spoon in his hand, he will lead it toward his mouth. Or you can help him to lead the spoon to the mouth for few times and then he will continue by himself).

2. Visual cue. If possible, eat together. When the person will see you eating, he will probably mimic you.



Check which cues and how many the person needs. Try to avoid doing the feeding for the person.

If independent eating takes too long, you may help the person finish in the end.



Finger Foods

If the person has difficulty using utensils, it doesn't mean he is not able to eat independently. Allow him to eat with his fingers!

It is possible to adjust many kinds of food to finger foods. In fact, every kind of food that can be served in small pieces, for example: sandwiches, pastry, pies, fruits and vegetables, boiled eggs, meatballs, schnitzel, French fries, falafel and so on.



Feed if there is no other option

How to make mealtime pleasant and get the person involved



Make sure the person is sitting straight, the head and the body are not tilting forward or backward. It's important that the person stays alert during mealtime.

Talk to the person during mealtime, explain what food he is being served, ask if he likes it.

Avoid talking on the phone during feeding, give your full attention to the person, interact with him.

Encourage the person to choose even if he doesn't eat independently (for example, ask if he wants to start with the puree or with the chicken).

Make sure the feeding process is gentle and give small amounts of food for every bite. A small spoon may help to control the food amount.

Adapt yourself to the person's rhythm, make sure he had chewed and swallowed the food before you offer the next bite.

Try to avoid force-feeding! If the person rejects food decisively, try to propose food later in a different situation.

Little "tricks" to enhance the person's feeling of participation and involvement in the eating process

Give the person a utensil to hold while he is being fed. This will connect the client to the process.

Feed hand over hand: the person holds the utensil and you hold the person's hand and lead it.

While feeding, lay the person's hand on your arm that you feed with. This will make the person feel that he is the one who brings the utensil to the mouth.

⊕ Objects that support independent eating

Heavy utensils may reduce trembling.

Persons who have difficulty to pick up food with a fork, may benefit from using a **spoon** instead.

Persons who tend to take big amounts of food at once will benefit from using a **little spoon**.

If person has a hard time using fork and knife, suggest eating from a **high boarded plate** instead of using the knife.





How to stimulate senses during mealtime

Eating involves many senses: smell, taste, vision, touch. The sensory experience brings pleasure and encourages eating.



Add spices and offer food with strong flavours:

Tea with mint/lemon/ginger

An oatmeal with cinnamon or coconut

Offer mustard/ horse radish/ pickles during lunchtime

The food is almost ready and the smell is spreading all over the house? Great! That is a sign for the upcoming meal

Colourful food is visually stimulating

For instance, a colorful salad.

Try to offer familiar flavours from the past

For example, traditional foods and foods from childhood.

The person rejects food?

Try to increase the appetite with a little treat, for example, something sweet.



The eating environment

Set up an “eating environment” before starting the meal:

Put a tablecloth, a napkin holder, flowers, a fruit bowl, a nice tableware and so on.

Reduce sources of distraction like radio and TV.

You may turn the music on if it helps the person to concentrate. Quiet music that the person enjoys.

High contrast between the food and the plate and between the table, the plate and the utensils facilitates recognition of objects and locating them.



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