Eating well with dementia

It is important that people with dementia eat well. However, it is common for people with dementia to have problems with eating.

Hints for meal times

• Encourage eating with others where possible.
• Set up a relaxed eating space. Turn off the radio and TV.
• Serve meals and snacks at regular times, and allow plenty of time for meals.
• Offer meals and snacks when the person is most alert.
• Avoid patterns or extra items on tables and plates.
• Serve one course or even one food at a time to reduce confusion. Offer small portions at a time.
• Prompt the person to eat during the meal and place cutlery in their hands.
• Reduce risk of burns by ensuring food is not too hot.

Food ideas

• Use familiar foods – cook and present them in familiar ways.
• Try bright, colourful food that looks and smells good.
• Offer nourishing drinks in between meals if needed, for example, milkshakes.
• Finger foods can make meal and snack times easier. See the handout ‘Eating Well with Dementia – Finger Foods’ for more information.
• Leave easy-to-eat snacks within easy reach (but not foods that should be kept in the fridge).
• Add minced meat, eggs or legumes in your casseroles/stews.
• Soft, moist foods may be easier to eat.
• Be careful of sticky, dry or crunchy foods as they may cause choking.
• Be aware that some people may have difficulty coping with two textures in one mouthful. An assessment by a speech pathologist may be needed.
If overeating is a problem

• Have healthy, low energy snacks within easy reach, for example fruit, or pieces of cooked vegetables.
• Spread meals and snacks out over the day.
• Provide low energy fluids such as water at the beginning of a meal.
• Distract the person with outings and activities.
• In some cases you may need to lock food away.

If spilling of foods and drinks is a problem

• Try adapted cups and lightweight cutlery. Ask your community nurse or occupational therapist for help.
• Place a non-slip placemat under the plate.
• Cut up meat and hard vegetables or try finger foods.

Changes in food likes and dislikes

• Be aware the person may like odd tastes for example, sweet and savoury mixes.
• Try new dishes.
• If the person craves sweet foods, give them healthy sweet foods like dairy foods and fruit.
• Ask your GP to check medications as they may cause taste changes.