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5 Star Services for Aged Care, Childcare & Retirement Living

# Improving Nutrition for people with Dementia

By Simone Cammarere, OSCAR Care Group Dietitian

## What is dementia?

Dementia is the umbrella term for a number of symptoms that are caused by disorders in the brain. One in ten people over the age of 65 experience Dementia & this statistic increases to three in ten over the age of 85.

There are many different types of Dementia & all effect the way your brain sorts information impacting the way you think, act, socialise & live.

Some of the most common symptoms of Dementia include:

- Memory impairment
- Inability to concentrate or undertake tasks
- Confusion
- Loss of interest in daily life

## What impact does Dementia have on Nutrition?

As Dementia has a great impact on daily life it often causes problems from a nutrition perspective.

In early stages of Dementia people may lose the ability to prepare food as tasks such as following a recipe become difficult.

As Dementia develops people can sometimes find it hard to keep track of time and forget to eat or lose concentration and don't finish meals. Use of utensils such as knives and forks may become difficult and they may no longer be able to chew and swallow food safely. Due to all of these factors people with Dementia are in a high-risk group for weight loss and malnutrition.



### Dementia Action Week

21-27 September 2020

A little support makes a lot of difference



### Dementia Action Week

Dementia affects close to half a million Australians. That number is set double in the next 25 years.

Dementia Action Week 2020 will demonstrate that many people living with Dementia can continue to live well for many years after their diagnosis. Many continue to make significant contributions to our community, they engage, make their own choices and live rich and active lives.



Malnutrition

Malnutrition is when a person is not meeting their daily requirements for macro and micro nutrients.

Consequences of malnutrition include frailty with increase falls risk, weight loss, poor healing wounds and increased confusion.

These things can significantly impact the quality of life of elderly adults with a co-morbidity of Dementia.



Ensuring good Nutrition in those with Dementia

Sometimes those with Dementia find it difficult to stick to traditionally structured meals. Flexibility can be helpful. It has been noted that some residents in Aged Care may have better intake if breakfast is served later in the morning when they are more alert.

Behavioural issues associated with Dementia are common & if behaviours are exacerbated at a meal time residents may not eat. Having food readily available is important as residents may better tolerate food outside regular meal times.

Food served in the nursing home should be flavourful and it is important to ensure variety.

Offering residents with Dementia additional serves of foods that they like, whether it's sweets and desserts or sandwiches, has been seen to have good results on overall intake and nutrition status and therefore is encouraged.

The food itself is not the only important thing contributing to a person with Dementia's intake.

It is important to keep a calm environment at meal times to avoid further confusion.

Residents also often have better intake when praised, encouraged and reminded to eat.

Hydration also needs to be considered in this group and where possible if malnourished fluids should be nourishing providing them with energy and/or protein items such as milky drinks, nutritional supplements and juice over water.



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## Tips for successful dining in residents with Dementia

- Using extra sauces, gravies and dressings for those who have poor taste or those with a dry mouth
- Serve foods that are easy to chew and accommodate to a person's ability (ie. Cut up food if they find this difficult for themselves).
- Take note of what residents like and offer these foods if they are not eating well at meal times
- Avoid patterns on crockery or table cloths as busy designs can cause confusion
- Offer additional servings when residents are eating well
- Have staff members continually praise and prompt residents to eat
- Allow residents to eat at their own pace do not overwhelm them
- Offer finger foods if residents wish to self-feed but have difficulty using utensils

### Finger food

Finger foods have been proven to be a way to increase the food intake of residents in Aged Care.

Some residents are no longer able to use utensils. Finger foods allow them to maintain a level of independence. Many residents with Dementia are unable to sit in a dining area for the duration of a meal. For residents who like to pace finger foods are a great option.

Some ideas for finger foods include:

- Ice-cream in a cone or ice blocks
- Fruit platters
- Sandwiches
- Mini quiches or sliced frittata
- Toast
- Mini pastries – sweet or savoury
- Fish cakes or fish fingers
- Nuggets
- Tetra packs of milks or juice
- Pancakes or Scones



### Food preference

It has been noted that certain types of Dementia will cause changes in food preference. Some people may no longer tolerate spicy foods while others may need lots of flavour.

One example of change in food preference is people with Frontotemporal Dementia who often crave sweeter foods, which may or may not be accompanied by behaviours of overeating.

For residents with or at risk of malnutrition every mouthful counts and therefore it is important to provide high energy and high protein (HEHP) options to suit their preference.

Some ideas for HEHP sweet foods include:

- Custard
- Mousse
- Yoghurt
- Ice cream
- Smoothies or Milkshakes
- Muffins
- Cakes
- Fruit toast
- Extra servings of desserts
- Pancakes
- Scones



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## Understand more. Know the facts.

Every three seconds, someone in the world develops dementia.

Dementia has become the leading cause of death among Australian women, and remains the second leading cause of death across all Australians.

Find more facts and statistics: [Dementia Australia](https://www.dementia.org.au)



### Summary

- People with Dementia need to be treated with respect & supported.
- Weight loss and malnutrition are risks for people with Dementia.
- There are simple nutrition strategies that can be put in place that make a huge difference for the individual with Dementia.



### Do you need support with a Nutrition plan for with someone with Dementia?

This article was written by Simone Cammarere, **OSCAR** Care Group Dietitian. Please call or email our Dietitians via the contact details below.

### References

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