



# Care Partner Information

## *Tips for Providing Older Adult Care*

### Eating and Drinking with Dementia

#### Problems with Eating

As we get older, there are changes that affect eating. Older adults are less able to taste and smell. Some people have trouble chewing and swallowing. Having a dry mouth is common. Some have trouble with their bowels or stomach. There are other problems when people have dementia. For example, they may not recognize food. They often don't want to eat at mealtimes, or they may forget to eat. Below are ways to help people with dementia eat better.

#### Tips to Help People with Dementia with Eating

Serve food in a quiet place. Turn off the TV and radio. Avoid interruptions.
Cut food into bite-sized pieces.
Make sure dentures, glasses, and hearing aids are in place.
Serve one food at a time.
Remove utensils that are not needed. For example, remove forks if eating soup.
Encourage self-feeding. Say things like "pick up your spoon."

Colorful foods, like fruits and vegetables, have more vitamins than "junk food." Vitamins from food are better than vitamin pills. Below are examples of good foods a person should eat.

#### Good Foods to Eat

Food	Examples	Daily Amount
<b>Fruits</b>	apples, bananas, berries, 100% fruit juices	2 - 2½ cups
<b>Vegetables</b>	broccoli, carrots, spinach, squash	2 - 2½ cups
<b>Grains</b>	bread, cereal, oatmeal, pasta, rice	1 cup
<b>Dairy</b>	cheese, milk, yogurt	⅓ cup cheese or yogurt, 2 cups milk
<b>Protein</b>	beans, eggs, fish, meats, nuts, poultry	⅔ cup

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at [www.aging.arizona.edu](http://www.aging.arizona.edu)

## Problems with Drinking

People with dementia may not drink enough because they don't feel thirsty. They may even forget to drink. If they don't drink, they may have problems going to the bathroom. They may also get dizzy and fall. How much should they drink? If the urine is dark yellow, they are not drinking enough. If urine is clear, they are getting enough.

Tips to Help People with Dementia with Drinking		
Offer drinks all day long.		
Always have a drink nearby, where the person can see it during meals.		
Use a clear, brightly colored glass or cup so they can see it.		
Make sure the glass or cup is not too big or heavy. It should be easy to lift and hold.		
Just because a glass is empty, it does not mean the person drank it. Check for spills.		
Water is the best drink, but it's OK to offer other drinks too.		
Sometimes, adding flavoring to the water helps a person want to drink more.		

## Choking

People with dementia can choke while eating or drinking. You can help avoid choking by cutting food into small pieces. Make sure they chew food well and eat and drink slowly. Call 911 if you see signs of choking. You can perform the Heimlich maneuver if you know how, but you should still seek medical care after choking stops, just to be sure things are okay.

Signs of Choking		
Coughing while eating or drinking	Clutching the throat	Turning blue
Unable to talk while eating	Wheezing	Passing out

## Eating and Drinking at the End of Life

In the late stage of dementia, people often do not eat or drink. This is normal in the late stages of dementia near the end of life. Not eating or drinking does not make the person feel sick. You do not have to push or force the person to eat and drink. Not eating or drinking is just the natural part of the end of life with dementia.

### Useful Websites

- Tips on feeding problems in dementia: <http://www.alz.org/care/alzheimers-food-eating.asp>
- Information about choking: [www.nsc.org/safety\\_home/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Pages/Choking.aspx](http://www.nsc.org/safety_home/HomeandRecreationalSafety/Pages/Choking.aspx)

**Written By: Karen D'Huyvetter, ND, RN-MS, MS-HES**

Alzheimer's disease and Related Dementia ~ Care Partner Information

Edited by an interprofessional team from the University of Arizona Center on Aging,  
Alzheimer's Association - Desert Southwest Chapter and Community Caregivers