



Quick Tips

Encouraging someone to eat

There are many reasons why someone may lose interest in eating and drinking, or turn down what they are offered.

There are many factors that can reduce someone's appetite. We have suggestions on situations that mostly affect people who have dementia or other significant health problems.

The Quick Tips on reduced appetite has suggestions on situations that can affect everyone:

- Not getting enough exercise.
- Changes to someone's sense of smell and taste.
- Feeling low or depressed.
- Having a painful mouth.
- Chronic illness and medication.
- Being tired or worrying about things.

Understanding why it happens

Physical problems: Some physical health problems such as tremors, dry mouth or swallowing problems can all affect someone's ability to eat and put people off eating. Speech and Language Therapists or Occupational Therapists can often help with lots of these issues so speak to the GP about a referral.

Finding it hard to say what you want: Sometimes people living with dementia have difficulty communicating when they are hungry or what they would like to eat. This can make it hard for people who care about them to work out what they want.

Not recognising food: This is a particular concern for people living with dementia, as their sight can be affected and they may no longer recognise the food on their plate.

Where and when someone eats

Be led by the person on when they prefer to eat.

- Some people like a light lunch and larger evening meal. Others prefer a main meal in the middle of the day or a bigger breakfast.
- Many people find 5 or 6 small snacks during the day easier than a few bigger meals.
- If someone is awake for much of the night then night-time snacks may also be a good option for them.

Try eating together if the person enjoys company.

- This will help make eating a social activity
- It can also help maintain independence as they may be able to copy what you do if they are not sure how to get started.

Being involved in meals

Let people see and smell food when you are cooking. Many people find this helps their relative or friend as they can watch their facial expressions to work out what they would like to eat.

Try using photographs or pictures of food to help people to choose what they want and communicate.

Some people find that talking about food they enjoyed when they were younger is a good way to get them interested and involved.

Encourage them to get involved at mealtimes. They could help prepare the food or lay the table.

Let the person choose where they sit and eat. And it's ok if the person wants to move about.

The right environment

Make the environment as appealing to the senses as possible. Sounds of cooking, smells from the kitchen, and familiar sights such as tablecloths with cutlery can all help to stimulate someone's appetite.

Many people find it easier to eat when they are sitting upright at a table, rather than eating from their lap or a low table.

Keep the table free from clutter. Only have what you will need. Avoid patterned

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plates and tablecloths which can be confusing and make it harder to see what is on the table.

Have a good contrast between the table, the plate and the food, such as a white plate on a wooden table, or a green table cloth and a red plate with mashed potato.

A noisy environment can be distracting. Where you have chosen to eat should be calm and relaxing, so try having no television or radio.

Some people find playing soothing music at mealtimes helps.

Have good lighting near the table.

How food is presented

When we are eating, we engage all 5 senses: taste, sight, hearing, touch and smell. If one of the senses is dulled or not working properly, it affects how we perceive the taste of the food we're eating.

- Having colourful food with different textures can help.
- Try adding a little bit of butter or olive oil to make food glossy.

- Add garnishes that give extra crunch and texture.
- Try a small sprinkling of sugar on savoury foods.
- Try foods that have a distinctive smell.

Try not to overload the plate with too much food. Some people find having just one of 2 foods on the plate at a time also helps.

It may also help to give the person a verbal description of the food.

Encourage the person to drink enough, even if that means they go to the bathroom more often, as that reduces other health problems.

- Diluted fruit juice and thicker drinks like smoothies can work well for someone who wants more colour and taste.
- Use smaller glasses or mugs that are easy to hold and not too heavy.

Making eating as easy as possible

If the person is having difficulty chewing or swallowing, try naturally soft food such as scrambled egg or stewed apple in the first

instance, before considering puréed food.

Try giving encouragement and gentle reminders to eat, and of what they are eating.

Try not to worry about mess - it's more important for the person to eat than to be tidy. Wipe clean mats and covers may help.

It's important the person doesn't feel rushed and they are given enough time to eat.

If food goes cold it will lose its appeal. Consider serving half portions to keep food warm or use a plate warmer or microwave to reheat food.

Get enough calories from small portions

If someone's appetite is really small, you want to get a good amount of energy from a small amount of food.

- It can help to have high calorie foods, such as full fat milk and butter or nuts.
- Ice cream can be easy to take and if you choose the right type will have good quality calories.
- In some cases, a dietician can prescribe oral nutritional supplements, such as fortified drinks. They can be mixed in with regular food.

Food Buddies Quick Tips

Food Buddies develops practical help for older people, people living with dementia and other people who sometimes have problems around food. We are trying to make life easier for people, staying safe and continuing to shop, cook and enjoy food.

This guide has been brought together with older people and their friends and families who are sharing their experience to help other people. We hope it is also useful for volunteers and staff who support people.

We would like to thank everyone who has helped us develop our Quick Tips.

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