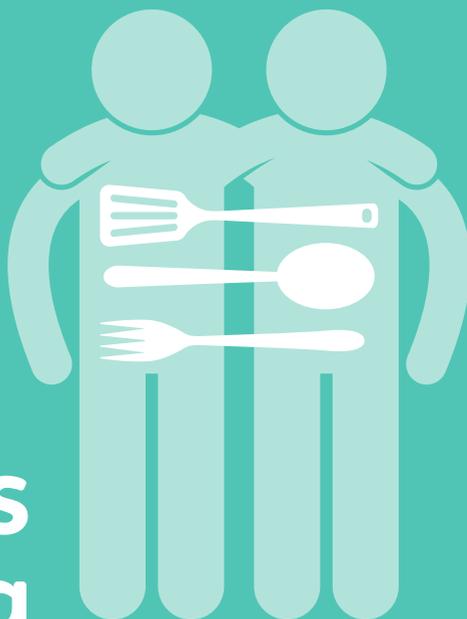




## Quick Tips



# Changes in eating habits

It is common for our eating habits to change as we get older.

- Our sense of taste and smell often changes, so foods taste different from the way they did before.
- Health problems and the medications we take can add to this.
- A condition like dementia can add more changes to how we taste food and drinks.
- Lots of people find they prefer smaller portions.

Some people prefer to have more small meals instead of three bigger meals.

But this can all be a worry for the people who are affected and for their family and friends and people who support them.

Each person's experience is different and you will find what works for you. We hope these tips give you ideas and practical approaches that will make life easier for you and the people you know.

## Finding the right approach for you

Think about whether this is a short-term situation – such as when someone has a bad cold and can't taste anything – or whether it has been going on for a while. How you adapt to a longer-term situation may need more changes to what you do.

Our main message is to try different foods to find ones that people enjoy. That might be foods that you didn't like before – keep exploring! Try eating at different times, or having smaller portions.

- If all you want is sweet foods try fruit or naturally sweet vegetables (such as carrots or sweet potato) as a healthier option than biscuits and cakes.
- Add small amounts of honey or sugar to savoury food.
- Add some herbs and spices to enhance flavours.

- Try serving sweet sauces or chutneys (eg apple sauce or sweet chilli sauce) with savoury dinners.
- Add a small amount of syrup, jam or honey to puddings to increase sweetness.

### **“Stronger flavours can help when everything tastes like cardboard.”**

When you are worrying about someone else:

- You can try our tips to see if that helps the person enjoy the food they usually eat.
- You can try food they have never eaten before but remember the person's preferences and practices.
- Look for substitutes that bring what they eat now closer to their usual food.
- If they want to eat unusual food combinations, just accept it even though you may find it difficult or odd. It is unlikely to cause them harm and they are eating.

For further information about Food Buddies, more tips and other useful sources of information, visit our website: [www.otbds.org/projects/food-buddies](http://www.otbds.org/projects/food-buddies)

## Coping with major changes in what someone prefers

Sometimes people who are living with dementia make food choices that do not match their usual beliefs or preferences, or will cause them harm.

- One example is when someone who is diabetic wants to eat sweet foods that they have not taken for years.
- Another is when a person who has been a vegetarian for many years seems to want to eat meat.

There could be several different reasons why they seem to have chosen to eat this now:

- Their food preferences have changed.
- They may have forgotten that they don't eat this type of food.
- They have remembered that they used to eat this food in the past, before they became vegetarian or diabetic.

- They may see other people eating it and want the same, without knowing what it is.

Knowing what to do in these situations may be difficult but here are some approaches that other people find work.

- Use what you know about the person. If they are showing a different preference, consider what might be the reason for this. Try to respond to the underlying reason rather than just immediately give them the food that they are asking for.
- Try offering an alternative that looks like the food other people have, such as a low sugar pudding or Quorn instead of meat.
- Offer the food they usually have, and go to a place that is quieter with fewer distractions.
- If they still do want to eat the food they usually avoid, try a very small portion to see if they do like it.

- Be aware of any impact on the person's wellbeing – for example if they are finding something they don't usually eat difficult to digest, or it will cause them harm in other ways.
- Always try to do what is in the person's best interests.

**“Don't get stressed out if someone eats a small bit of something that won't harm them. Gently take them to the food they always enjoy.”**



## **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.

Food Buddies is a project based at Outside the Box.

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