
Dementia: Challenges with Constipation, Dehydration, and Changes in Taste and Smell

What is Dementia?

Dementia is a group of symptoms related to a decline in memory or other thinking skills that make it hard to do daily activities. Dementia can cause changes in thinking, behavior, feelings, appetite, chewing, and swallowing.

Nutrition Basics

There is no “diet” for people with Dementia. It is important to eat a variety of foods and maintain a healthy weight. Your Dietitian can help you stay healthy with Dementia.

Changes in Taste and Smell

Foods may not taste or smell the way they used to and you or your loved one may not want to eat as much.

- Try to eat or offer favorite foods.
- Be patient, favorite foods change. Favorite foods may even change from meal to meal.
- It is good to have a backup choice in case your loved one doesn't want what you made. Some ideas are a low sodium freezer meal, tuna or egg salad, or a low sodium soup or casserole that can easily be cooked in the microwave.

Constipation

Not eating or moving as much can cause constipation.

- Try to eat fiber at each meal. Fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grains are full of fiber. If food is not enough, ask your Dietitian about a powdered fiber supplement that can be added to juice or water.
- Fluids are important for bowel movements. Try to drink at least 8 cups (64oz) of fluid each day.

Dehydration

As people age they often drink less. Some medicines can also cause dehydration.

- Water, juice, and milk, and foods with lots of water like soups, milkshakes, fruits, and vegetables can all help with fluid intake.
- Drinks with caffeine (like regular coffee and tea) can add to dehydration so be sure to include some other fluids too.

Resources

Your Dietitian can continue to help you with resources, but you can also review these online.

- Meals on Wheels- <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/> “VA does not endorse and is not responsible for the content of the linked Web site.”
- Alzheimer’s Association- <https://www.alz.org/> “VA does not endorse and is not responsible for the content of the linked Web site.”