

About you: Nutrition

This help sheet is about the importance of good nutrition and suggests practical ways to ensure you eat well.

Eating well is important for your overall health and wellbeing. Good nutrition can help you to:

- fight off illness or recover from injury
- manage other health conditions
- reduce health complications such as falls and infections.

Some people living with dementia may experience changes that affect eating well, which could include:

- loss of appetite
- overeating, or developing a hunger that cannot be satisfied
- craving strong-flavoured food that is sweet or salty
- changes to taste and smell
- forgetting to eat and drink
- forgetting how to chew or swallow
- a dry mouth, or mouth discomfort.

Nutrition advice

Eating a varied and balanced diet, and drinking plenty of water can help you to stay well.

A healthy diet should include a variety of foods from each of the following food groups:

- vegetables and legumes/beans
- fruit
- grain foods, mostly wholegrain and/or high fibre cereals
- lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds
- milk, yoghurt cheese and/or alternatives, mostly reduced fat.

Try to limit foods and drinks containing saturated fat, added salt and added sugars.

To stay well, book regular appointments with your doctor or a dietician to receive advice specific to your needs.

Forgetting to eat or drink

Dementia can cause someone to forget to eat or drink.

Below are some tips on how you can try to ensure you continue to eat a balanced diet:

- To remind yourself to have a meal or snack, set an alarm or arrange for someone to remind you.
- Prepare or buy snacks that are easy to eat and do not need to be refrigerated. Leave them out so they can be easily seen.

Organising meals

You may no longer be able to, or not want to, prepare a meal for yourself or others.

What to try:

- Whenever possible, make mealtimes shared social occasions involving family and friends in food preparation, eating with you, or both. You may be able to prepare extra food and freeze into meal-sized portions.
- Buy prepared meals from the supermarket. Or arrange home-delivered meals from restaurants, fast food outlets, meal delivery companies or Meals on Wheels. Choose meals which help meet your daily nutritional needs.
- Contact My Aged Care or the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) to ask about meal delivery services or home support to assist you with meal preparation.
- Eat out. Choose a venue where you feel comfortable that serves food you enjoy.
- Stock up on healthy snacks that do not need preparation or cooking, such as yoghurt, cheese or dried fruit.

Drinking alcohol

Alcohol is high in kilojoules, is nutrient-poor and can lead to weight gain. It can be harmful to your overall health.

No amount of alcohol is considered as completely safe.

What to try:

- Make sure you are well-nourished.
- Do not drink alcohol on an empty stomach.
- Have low-alcohol or alcohol-free drinks.

Who can help

- A doctor or dietitian can advise you about good nutrition. Your local hospital, community health service, or your doctor can put you in touch with a dietitian.
- Speech therapists and occupational therapists can provide further support.
- Information on home support can be found on the My Aged Care website or the National Disability Insurance Scheme website
Visit myagedcare.gov.au or ndis.gov.au

Additional reading and resources

- Dementia Australia national library
Visit: dementia.org.au/library
- Dementia Australia support
Visit: dementia.org.au/support
- Dementia Australia education
Visit: dementia.org.au/education

Further information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling.

National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500

For language assistance: 131 450

Visit our website: dementia.org.au