

# NUTRITION TIPS/STRATEGIES FOR OLDER ADULTS WITH DEMENTIA

## Problem:

Older adults with dementia are prone to have challenges consuming regular, nutritious meals. As psychological, physiological, and social changes in a person's life occur due to cognitive decline, he or she may forget to eat or become overwhelmed by too many food choices. However, studies have shown that human nutrition and lifestyle factors can modify the risk of onset dementia (Coppede et al.,2012)

## Nutritional Deficiencies & Consequences

(Barney, K. F., & Perkinson, 2016, p. 172)

### Vitamin D:

Fall risk  
Risk of mortality  
Risk of osteoporosis  
Risk of hip fracture  
Risk of functional deterioration

Iron:

Anemia

### Vitamin B12:

Loss of balance  
Poor cognition  
Risk of vascular disease  
Risk of age-related macular degeneration  
Risk of depression

### Vitamin B6:

Risk of depression  
Anemia  
Risk of cognitive decline  
Risk of vascular disease

### Folate:

Risk of depression  
Poor cognition  
Risk of vascular disease  
Megaloblastic anemia

### Calcium:

Risk of osteoporosis

## How does Nutrition Impact Everyday Occupations?

1. Increased energy level
2. Improved mood and mental health
3. Improved memory and brain function
4. Weight control
5. Stronger Immune System
6. Better sleep
7. Prevents diseases and illnesses
8. Increase productivity and attention



## How can OT help?

Occupational therapists strive to enhance function promote relationships, and social participation. They find way to help those with dementia enjoy life to the fullest. Giving specific nutritional advice is outside the scope of practice as occupational therapists, however giving clients information needed to make healthy food decisions is crucial. Occupational therapist can address areas of occupations involving nutrition by helping clients with tasks like meal planning, meal preparation, grocery shopping, proper chewing and swallowing techniques, and educate on nutritious meals.



## How can a Dietitian help?

Maintaining a healthy weight can be challenging for people with dementia. A dietitian can complete a full nutritional assessment and can offer advice for good nutrition.

## REASONS WHY SOMEONE WITH DEMENTIA MAY NOT EAT ENOUGH

1. REDUCED APPETITE
2. DECREASE TIME SPENT SOCIALIZING
3. OVERWHELMED BY TOO MUCH FOOD
4. CONFUSION WITH EATING UTENSILS

## HABITS TO ENCOURAGE PROPER NUTRITION:

1. STAY HYDRATED
2. LIMIT DISTRACTIONS
3. PLAN MEALS
4. KEEP TABLE SETTINGS SIMPLE
5. GIVE PLENTY OF TIME TO EAT
6. EATING WITH OTHERS
7. HAVE MULTIPLE MEALS A DAY

### What foods to eat:

- **Adhering to Mediterranean diet, DASH diet, or plant-based diet**
- **Omega-3:** fish, flaxseeds, walnuts, eggs
- **Vitamin B12:** meat, shellfish, dairy foods, tempeh, fortified breakfast cereals
- **Folate:** spinach, legumes, sunflower seeds, oranges, bananas, strawberries, avocados, corn, and pumpkin
- **Vitamin B6:** peanuts, eggs, potatoes, soya beans, and fish
- **Vitamin D:** salmon, egg yolks, mushrooms, yogurt, milk, tofu, spinach, and soy-milk
- **Calcium:** yogurt, milk, sardines, leafy greens, cottage cheese, and oranges.



### Nutrition Tips:

- **Have a balanced diet with a variety of foods** → Consume lots of vegetables, fruits, whole-grains, lean protein foods, and low-fat dairy products
- **Avoid foods with high saturated cholesterol and fat** → Limit fats that are bad for health, such as lard and fatty cuts of meats, solid shortening, and butter.
- **Cut down on refined sugars** → Avoid refined sugars processed foods and substitute a sweet tooth with healthier options like fresh juice, fruit, and dark chocolate.
- **Use less salt and limit foods with high sodium** → Cut down by using spices or herbs to season food as an alternative (“Food and Eating”, n.d.)

## **HOW TO MINIMIZE NUTRITION & EATING PROBLEMS**

(“Food and Eating”, n.d.)

### **1. AVOID HAZARDOUS FOODS & SIGNS OF CHOKING:**

Be aware of foods that are difficult to chew. Have an upright posture with head slightly in a forward position. Always add more foods in mouth once food has been swallowed.

### **2. PREPARE FOODS THAT ARE EASY TO CHEW OR SWALLOW:**

Cut foods into small bit-sized pieces, grind foods, and eat soft foods, such as Jell-O, applesauce, eggs, and mashed potatoes.

### **3. ADDRESS CONCERNS OF HAVING DECREASED APPETITE:**

If you are experiencing decreased appetite, try to plan several small meals throughout the day, prepare favorite foods, and increase your physical activity.

## **HOW TO ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENT EATING**

(“Food and Eating”, n.d.)

### **1. ADAPT EATING UTENSILS AND DISHES:**

Use spoons and forks with large handles or plates with edges to make it easier to eat independently.

### **2. TRY FINGER FOODS:**

Try bite-sized finger foods that are easy to pick up, such as chicken wings/nuggets, spring rolls, sandwiches, potato wedges, wraps, and steamed vegetables.

### **3. USE “MIRRORING” TECHNIQUE:**

Try to watch another person hold a spoon and eat from a bowl and mirror them as they show you.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

### **MEALS ON WHEELS:**

Home delivery meals for senior adults

[https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/?gclid=EA1aIQobChMIsNvgzaWU2gIV1LfACh1FqwzLEAAYASAAEgI6TfD\\_BwE](https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/?gclid=EA1aIQobChMIsNvgzaWU2gIV1LfACh1FqwzLEAAYASAAEgI6TfD_BwE)

### **MY PLATE FOR OLDER ADULTS:**

Provides examples of foods that fit into a healthy well-balanced diet.

<https://hnrca.tufts.edu/myplate/>

### **NUTRITION PROGRAMS FOR OLDER ADULTS:**

Food and nutrition programs that focus on the needs of older Americans, age 60 and over.

<https://www.nutrition.gov/topics/food-assistance-programs/nutrition-programs-seniors>

#### **How can the interventions improve occupational engagement?**

- A patient with dementia will be able to carry out coordinated tasks and actions of eating nutritious foods that have been served with several tips and strategies, making it easier for them to bring food to the mouth, chewing and swallowing, and cutting or breaking foods into small pieces.
- With the several strategies provided above will allow a patient with dementia develop independence in food preparation and self-feeding.
- With the list of several types of foods to consume under each area of vitamin and minerals will help prevent deficiencies and lower the risk of other consequences. Vitamins and nutrients are essential nutrients because they perform several roles in the body and help us sustain a healthy life.

## Resources:

Barney, K. F., & Perkinson, M. A. (2016). *Occupational therapy with aging adults: Promoting quality of life through collaborative practice* (pp. 172-174). St. Louis, MO: Elsevier.

Coppede, F., Bosco, P., Fuso, A., & Troen, A. M. (2012). Nutrition and dementia. *Current gerontology and geriatrics research, 2012*.

Ellis, E. (n.d.). Healthy Eating for Older Adults. Retrieved June 10, 2020, from <https://www.eatright.org/food/nutrition/dietary-guidelines-and-myplate/healthy-eating-for-older-adults>

Food and Eating. (n.d.). Retrieved June 10, 2020, from <https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/daily-care/food-eating>