



Improving nutrition for patients with dementia

A person with dementia can experience a variety of difficulties with eating and drinking. The impact of their disease may result in loss of appetite, changes in preferences and taste, visual disturbances which may make it difficult to recognise and see their food and drink and may find it difficult to communicate what they would like to eat or drink.

As a result of this additional prompting, encouragement and assistance is necessary.

Key points for staff:

- **Care should be patient centred** – get to know the patient and how their dementia is affecting them, and how we can support them to meet their nutrition and hydration needs by making reasonable adjustments to everyday care.
- **Getting to know the person** - use the 'forget-me-not' cards to collect person-centred information which will include food and drink likes, dislikes and routines, and also if a special diet or texture is required. Identify what help and support they need to eat and drink.

This information should be communicated in the patient's care plan, handover and the ward 'daily diet sheet'. Discuss with the person who knows the patient best if they require a quiet environment when they are eating and drinking or whether social interaction at mealtimes is more beneficial.

- **Reasonable adjustments** - Enlist the support of carers, relatives or volunteers at mealtimes if required. Act on the information collected in the forget-me-not document to support food preferences and choices. This may include a new liking for strong flavours, eg ketchup with all foods or an increased sweet tooth. Provide food at set times, but also provide snacks and drinks regularly throughout the day in between meals.
- **Practical interventions** - Prepare the person and the environment for mealtimes – prompt them before meals are due, clear away distracting items from the table, sit them in an appropriate position for eating (either in the bed or chair) and provide them with the opportunity to wash their hands. Use contrasting colours (eg. yellow crockery) to present food to help the patient with dementia see their food more easily on the plate. This contrast will be improved by placing plates on a red tray. Consider using coloured mugs or beakers, as clear plastic cups with water may be difficult for some people to see.



A person may forget to eat even when food is placed in front of them. Consider gently placing your hand over theirs to help guide the fork or spoon to their mouth.

Try 'finger foods' that can be carried around such as sandwiches, cheese portions, buttered scone, fruit such as bananas or grapes, cartons of drinks or cake bars

- **Specialist advice** - Regular assessment of needs, including nutritional screening, is essential to identify if any specialist advice and intervention is required, for example posture care, speech and language assessments, OT utensil adaptations, dietetic advice or specialist dementia advice through the acute liaison team.