

Nutrition Changes During the Dementia Journey

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As Dementia progress, you might find your loved one's preferences for food changes or that they might have changes in their weight. If you are experiencing this, you may wonder why this is happening. Dementia changes the way a person responds and desires food.

Dementia may cause the person to lose the taste of foods due to changes in their taste buds, so they may desire more sugary sweets. You may also see weight loss or weight gain because of this. Weight loss can occur when a person living with Dementia loses the ability to create an adequate amount of saliva, which can cause food to be harder to swallow, which could cause eating to become a chore. You can potentially see weight gain as people with Dementia start to snack more often between meals. They may also forget that they have eaten or recognize they are hungry or thirsty.

Preferences for foods may change as well. Someone who avoided sweets earlier in their life may desire them as their Dementia progresses. Sensory changes that can potentially occur as Dementia progresses can also be a factor in changes in preferences; someone who didn't like the texture of tomatoes previously may like the texture now. Susan, as another example, was a vegetarian previously but may now like meat; she may be in a time of her life when she ate meat.

However, there are some tips you can use to help your loved one.

1. Limit distractions. Use simple place settings, no patterns on plates or tablecloths that may cause a person with dementia to get distracted by the pattern or think that something needs to be picked up.
2. Play soothing music during meals.
3. Offer only a couple of things on the plate and/or put food in bowls that help a person be as independent as possible. The bowls help someone scoop food easier.
4. Use color contrasting plates on tablecloths, because, for some, it can become more difficult to see where the plate is on the table.
5. Be flexible with food preferences. Due to changes in cognition, sensations, and taste buds, your loved one may want different things than you are used to.
6. Allow plenty of time to eat. Sometimes it can take an hour or more for someone to finish eating.
7. Offer nutritious snacks.
8. If your loved one is experiencing difficulty manipulating and holding utensils, you might want to look into weighted utensils or finger foods based on their capabilities.
9. Prepare food easy to chew and swallow as their Dementia progresses. Cut up meats into small bites or cook vegetables so they are soft.
10. Limit high sodium, refined sugars, and salt. Use herbs and spices to flavor foods. Juice-sweetened baked goods are a good idea.
11. Have fruits, smoothies, soups available throughout the day.
12. Leafy greens, vegetables, legumes, fish, and dark chocolate are good options to increase nutrition intake.