



## November 2013 Nutrition Newsletter

Information and news for Care Homes  
in the Essex And Tendring Area

### How Dementia Can Affect Your Diet

Dementia can greatly affect a person's relationship to food and eating. The behavioural, emotional and physical changes that take place as dementia progresses can all have an impact upon a person's eating habits and on their intake of food and drink.

It is important to do what you can to make sure that the person you are caring for enjoys their food and eats a healthy, balanced diet. As dementia progresses eating can become difficult for some people. However, by making a few changes you can help keep mealtimes as enjoyable and stress free as possible.

### Eating & Drinking

As dementia progresses, eating and drinking can become difficult for some people. This newsletter looks at some of the difficulties that people with dementia may have with eating and drinking, and suggests ways to help.

A person with dementia may no longer recognise the food in front of them. They may struggle to use a knife and fork as co-ordination becomes difficult. The person may not open their mouths as food approaches and may need reminding to do so. Food may be difficult to chew or swallow or they may not want to accept assistance with eating.

If you are supporting a person with dementia at mealtimes it is important to remember that these reactions are not a deliberate attempt to be 'difficult', or a personal attack. The difficulties are likely to be related to changes caused by the person's dementia. When supporting a person at mealtimes it can be a challenge to identify what the problem is, particularly if the person themselves is finding it difficult to find the words to explain.

### Weight Loss

As dementia progresses, a person may lose weight unintentionally as a result of many of the difficulties mentioned above. This may be more noticeable if the person is very active because, for example, if they are walking regularly they will need more calories (energy) to maintain their weight. Some people may find small, frequent meals or nutritious snacks more tempting and easier to eat than three main meals a day, particularly if their appetite is small.



[www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)

All information in this newsletter can be found on the Alzheimer's website

[chu-ftr.foodfirst@nhs.net](mailto:chu-ftr.foodfirst@nhs.net) Tel: 01206 744552 Fax: 01206 744492



## Supporting a person with Dementia to eat and drink.

- Meals should be relaxed and unhurried. Allow plenty of time and make sure that there are no distractions such as a television or excess noise in the background.
- Do not feel you need to prepare elaborate meals - it is probably better to devote your energy to ensuring that the person eats and enjoys their food. Preferences and styles of eating may change, try to be flexible.
- If a person is agitated or distressed, do not pressurise them to eat or drink. Wait until the person is calm and less anxious before offering food and drink.
- If the person is drowsy or lying down, they may struggle to swallow safely. Ensure that they are alert, comfortable and sitting upright or, if in bed, well-positioned, before offering food and drink. (An occupational therapist can advise on positioning techniques and aids, ask your GP for a referral.)
- Take care when offering 'just boiled' hot drinks - some people with dementia may lose the ability to judge temperature.
- If the person appears to have difficulty using cutlery, you may need to prompt the person and guide their hand to their mouth to remind them of the process involved.
- Alternatively, if a person is struggling to use cutlery to eat, offer foods that can be eaten without a knife and fork, ie finger foods. Foods that can be picked up with the fingers are often easier to eat when co-ordination becomes difficult.
- If you have to assist a person to eat and drink, talk about what you are offering them to help remind them of tastes and flavours.

**The visual disturbances that can occur in dementia may result in a person having difficulty seeing similar colours together, for example identifying water in a glass or white fish on a white plate. Try offering coloured liquids such as orange juice that can be more clearly seen, or contrasting colours on a plate. Highly patterned plates can often cause confusion.**



**All information in this newsletter can be found on the Alzheimer's Society website.**



## Possible reasons for poor appetite

Difficulties with eating and drinking can have an effect on a person's health and on some of the symptoms of their dementia. It can result in weight loss and worsen confusion. There are numerous reasons why a person may have difficulty eating and drinking or decline food and drink. These include:

- **Depression** - Loss of appetite can be a sign of depression. Depression is very common; when someone becomes aware that they are in the early stages of dementia, feelings of despair and hopelessness are understandable. There are effective treatments for depression, including medication and other therapies. If you suspect that this is the problem, consult your GP. When the depression lifts, the person's appetite should return.
- **Physical discomfort** - The person may be having problems with badly fitting dentures, sore gums or painful teeth, all of which will make eating uncomfortable. If you think this might be a problem, ask your dentist to check.
- **Lack of exercise** - If the person is not very active during the day, they may not feel hungry. Try to encourage them to move around during the day and take part in physical activities or exercise. Consult a physiotherapist for advice on suitable exercise, you can get a referral from the GP.
- **Damage to the brain** - A person may not recognise the food and drink in front of them due to damage to the brain caused by dementia. Remind them of what the food and drinks are. The person may develop altered patterns of eating, for example, eat at times of the day that are unusual for them. Be flexible as to when food is available and encourage a person to eat whenever their appetite is good.
- **Difficulties with chewing and swallowing** - Chewing and swallowing can become difficult as dementia advances. If the person you are caring for is experiencing difficulties chewing and swallowing food, ask their GP for a referral to a speech and language therapist, who can offer advice and support.
- **Changes in food preferences** - Some people may develop significant changes in preferences for food. They may start to enjoy tastes that are unusual for them, such as spicy or sweet food. Experiment with seasoning foods and offer a variety of flavours to tempt the appetite.
- **Constipation** - This is a common problem and can result in a person feeling bloated or nauseous and can lessen their desire to eat. Try to prevent constipation by encouraging activity offering fibre-rich foods and plenty of fluids (guidelines recommend at least eight cups a day). If constipation becomes a severe problem, consult your district nurse or GP.

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## Highlighted Area of Good Practice

St Fillans Care Centre  
Colchester, Essex

The team at St Fillians Care Centre work together to provide all of their residents delicious and nutritional meals. Many of their residents have been diagnosed with Dementia and require additional calories due to poor appetite or high levels of activity.

Below Maureen Wear - Care Manager talks about how they tackle nutrition within the care home.

***“All of the food at St. Fillans is fortified with full fat milk, cream and butter wherever possible. We provide our residents with home made smoothies, and we have our regular ice cream rounds, which are both very popular with the residents who have Dementia.***

***Both sweet and savoury snacks are available at any time of the day or night.***

***We use finger foods for those with dementia who seem to prefer to feed themselves using fruit, sausages, sausage rolls and bite sized sandwiches.***

***We use red beakers for hot drinks. For the residents who have advanced dementia, we also use plate guards and tilted plates to encourage independence at meal times”***

### Lemon Meringue Milkshake

- 10 servings would provide
- 381 kcals
- 9.7g Protein

1 x 340g Jar Lemon Curd  
1 x 397g tin of Condensed Milk  
6 scoops of Vanilla Ice Cream  
1.5 litres Full Fat Milk

### **BLEND TOGETHER AND SERVE**

***Kindly donated by the team at  
St Fillians Care Centre Colchester***





# Nutrition Training & Study Day

In 2014 The Community Dietetic Team will be running several study days

All of these Study Sessions will be held at Colchester General Hospital

- 11<sup>th</sup> February 2014 - 13.30 – 17.00
- 14<sup>th</sup> February 2014 – 09.00 – 12.30
- 25<sup>th</sup> February 2014 – 09.00 - 12.30
- 25<sup>th</sup> February 2013 – 13.30 – 17.30

We are aiming to cover the following topics

- Nutrition/Food First
- Hydration
- MUST
- Dementia
- Tissue Viability & Pressure Sores
- End of Life Care
- Thickening fluids

The training will be provided by The Community Dietetic Team and other Health Care Professionals.

Because there only being a limited number of spaces available. Care Homes will be limited to 2 members of staff per home, for larger homes which have separate units please contact us if you wish to arrange extra spaces.

If you would like to book a place, please do not hesitate to contact us. There will be a £10 returnable deposit per person (returned on attendance)

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