

IS YOUR LOVED ONE EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTIES WITH EATING IN ADVANCED DEMENTIA?

Food plays a very important part in our lives, so it can be difficult for caregivers when they see their loved one losing interest in food and consequently losing weight.

This tends to happen towards the advanced stage of dementia. It may seem as though your loved one is being starved. However, the reality is that **their metabolic rate goes down and they use up less energy too.**

Your loved one may not be as active or mobile as before and may not require the same amount of calories they had when they were more active. In fact, **having a reduced interest in food or fluid intake can be a part of “natural progression” as we age.**

Here are some strategies that may help you deal with this issue:

- Look for opportunities to encourage your loved one to eat. If they are mostly at night, night-time snacks may be a good idea.
- Encourage your loved one to get involved in preparation during mealtimes where possible.
- Encourage your loved one to enjoy a snack.
- Offer familiar or favourite food and drinks.
- Choose the most flavourful food for mealtimes.
- Offer small amounts of food and drinks throughout the day.

In advanced dementia, when swallowing is weakened, your loved one may have an increased risk of food and fluid entering their lungs. **Offering food and drinks may no longer be safe when signs of choking or aspiration occur.**

The priority may then shift to making the senior or elderly feel comfortable.

Caregivers can:

- Moisten their loved one's lips
- Continue to let them have a little taste of their favourite food

This is part of comfort and pleasure feeding as it allows your loved one to maintain some dignity and retain the enjoyment of certain tastes. **It is important to never force feed or make them eat when they are drowsy.**

Alternative sources of artificial nutrition such as tube feeding have **not** been proven to increase patients' lifespan. It does not eliminate or reduce the risks of aspiration either as supervised oral feeding is as effective as tube feeding. On the contrary, **having a feeding tube may add discomfort to your loved one and they may need to be restrained, especially if there is a tendency to pull out the feeding tube**

