



• ENRICHING ELDER LIVES •

MOSAIC

CAREGIVERS GUIDE



SENIOR NUTRITION

THE FAMILY CAREGIVER'S GUIDE TO

SENIOR NUTRITION

Proper nutrition is essential for maintaining health, energy, and quality of life as we age. However, as we age, we often face challenges that make healthy eating difficult, such as reduced appetite, difficulty chewing or swallowing, medication side effects, or dietary restrictions. Those with Alzheimer's or dementia face additional issues with food, as the disease progresses, including forgetting whether they have eaten.



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about this

GUIDE

As a caregiver, you can take proactive steps to ensure your loved one receives the nutrition they need to thrive. This guide offers practical tips and strategies to help you navigate the world of senior nutrition.

COMMON CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Caring for a senior loved one comes with unique nutritional challenges that can impact their health and well-being. From a loss of appetite to difficulty swallowing, dehydration, and nutrient deficiencies, these obstacles can make it harder for them to maintain a balanced diet. Understanding why these issues occur and how to address them can help you provide the best possible care.

LOSS OF APPETITE

Why it happens: Aging can slow metabolism, reduce taste and smell sensitivity, and cause a diminished desire to eat. Certain medications may also suppress appetite.

What you can do:

- Serve smaller, nutrient-dense meals throughout the day instead of three large meals.
- Enhance flavors naturally with herbs and spices instead of salt.
- Create a routine with set meal and snack times.
- Offer favorite foods in a balanced way to stimulate appetite.



DIFFICULTY CHEWING OR SWALLOWING

Why it happens: Dental issues, dry mouth, or conditions like Parkinson's or stroke can make eating challenging. Poor fitting dentures also can make eating difficult or uncomfortable.

What you can do:

- Offer softer foods like mashed vegetables, oatmeal, scrambled eggs, and smoothies.
- Ensure proper hydration to prevent dry mouth.
- Consult a speech therapist or dietitian if swallowing difficulties persist.
- Visit a dentist to ensure dentures fit properly and are comfortable.

NUTRIENT DEFICIENCIES

Why it happens: Malabsorption, medication interactions, or a limited diet can lead to deficiencies in vitamins and minerals.

What you can do:

- Prioritize foods rich in calcium (dairy, leafy greens), vitamin D (salmon, fortified cereals), and fiber (whole grains, beans, fruits).
- Consider a multivitamin after consulting with a healthcare provider.
- Use enriched or fortified foods as needed.

POOR HYDRATION

Why it happens: Seniors may not feel thirsty as often, or they might limit fluids to reduce trips to the bathroom.

What you can do:

- Encourage regular sips of water throughout the day.
- Offer hydrating foods like fruits, soups, and yogurt.
- Make hydration more appealing with infused water (lemon, berries, or mint) or herbal teas.



SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS WITH ALZHEIMER'S AND DEMENTIA

Why it happens: In the middle or later stages of Alzheimer's and dementia, seniors may be overwhelmed with choices. They may forget to eat or think they already did eat. They may not be able to function as they used to.

What you can do:

- Limit distractions. Serve meals in a quiet place.
- Avoid patterned plates and tablecloths which could confuse someone with Alzheimer's or dementia. Provide only the utensils needed.
- Use a contrasting color to distinguish the food from the plate or table. White plates against a colored placement can help.
- Test the temperature of the food before serving. Your loved one may not be able to tell you if food is too hot.
- Serve only one or two items at a time. You can break the meal into several courses.
- Serve finger foods to make it easier for your loved one to feed themselves. Cut food into bite-sized pieces. Serve food that is easy to eat.
- Allow your loved one plenty of time to eat. They may take an hour or more.



TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING HEALTHY EATING

MAKE MEALS SOCIAL

Elderly loved ones may eat less when dining alone. Try to make mealtime a social event:

- Eat together whenever possible.
- Arrange for visits with family or friends during meals.
- Involve your loved one in meal preparation, with manageable tasks such as setting the table.

APPEAL TO PREFERENCES AND MEMORIES

Foods tied to positive memories can reignite interest in eating:

- Prepare nostalgic dishes they enjoyed in the past.
- Ask about favorite meals from their childhood.
- Involve them in meal planning or simple food prep.

Encouraging healthy eating in seniors can be challenging, but small changes can make a big difference in their overall well-being. Whether it's enhancing the flavor of meals, creating a pleasant dining environment, or introducing nutrient-rich snacks, there are many ways to make healthy eating more enjoyable and accessible. By incorporating simple strategies and a bit of creativity, you can help your loved one maintain a balanced diet that supports their health and quality of life.

TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING HEALTHY EATING

INVOLVE ALL 5 SENSES

To help entice your loved one to eat, choose foods that involve all 5 senses.

SIGHT

Bright vegetables like red peppers and carrots, garnishes with fresh herbs or berries

SOUND

Gentle sizzling of pan-fried food, crinkling of fresh herbs or crisp lettuce

SMELL

Fresh herbs like rosemary and basil, roasted garlic and onions, citrus scents like lemon or orange

TOUCH

Soft foods like mashed potatoes and steamed vegetables, velvety sauces, a mix of soft and crunchy textures

TASTE

Comfort foods like chicken noodle soup and mac and cheese, mild seasoning, sweet and savory combinations





TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING HEALTHY EATING

KEEP HEALTHY SNACKS ACCESSIBLE

If large meals are overwhelming, focus on nutrient-dense snacks:

- Greek yogurt with fruit
- Cheese and whole-grain crackers
- Nut butter on whole-wheat toast
- Hard-boiled eggs

MODIFY MEALS FOR SPECIAL DIETS

Many seniors have dietary restrictions, such as low-sodium or diabetic diets.

Work within these limits by:

- Using herbs and citrus instead of salt for flavor.
- Swapping white bread and pasta for whole-grain versions.
- Choosing lean proteins like poultry, fish, and beans.

WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

If your loved one experiences significant weight loss, persistent difficulty swallowing, or chronic digestive issues, consult a doctor or registered dietitian. They can offer specialized guidance and solutions, such as meal replacement shakes or medical interventions. By staying mindful of your loved one's nutritional needs and making small, sustainable adjustments, you can help them enjoy a healthier, more fulfilling lifestyle.



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THANK YOU!

Mosaic
PO Box 352
Absecon, NJ 08201
office@mosaicgiving.org
mosaicgiving.org
(609) 916-6520

Seashore Gardens Foundation DBA Mosaic is a trusted nonprofit leader in promoting and enhancing services and programs for the elderly. Its mission is to enrich the quality of life for the aged in Southern New Jersey.

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