

# Eating well with Dementia

Information for family, friends, & carers

**People living with dementia can often experience problems eating and drinking. This may be due to difficulty using cutlery, being distracted, problems recognising food, or changes in taste. It is important to eat well for good health, and there are many ways family, friends, and carers of people with dementia can help.**

## Not feeling hungry

You may find a person with dementia will eat less than they used to. This may be due to a loss of appetite, or they may have forgotten whether they have eaten or not. This can lead to weight loss but a little support can help them eat better.

### How can you help?

- Offer small meals and snacks throughout the day; a large serving might be overwhelming
- Make the most of nourishing drinks such as milky hot chocolate, milky coffee, or milkshakes



### How can HILS help?

- Having our meals delivered and plated by our friendly Community Team delivery staff can act as a reminder to eat
- We also offer higher energy meals (more calories) for people with a small appetite
- We have a poster with delicious milky drink recipes, and our booklet on Achieving Healthy Weight Gain has some useful tips; please let us know if you would like a copy



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## Staying Active

When someone has not been very active they may not feel hungry.

### How can you help?

- Encouraging them to do gentle exercise or go on short walks can help with appetite and improve their general mood

### How can HILS help?

- We run dementia clubs where people with mild to moderate dementia can spend a day taking part in fun activities and have a nutritious meal with us

## Getting Distracted

Minimising distractions during meal times can help people concentrate on their meals.

### How can you help?

- Avoid patterned plates, instead opt for plain crockery in a contrasting colour to the table; this can help the person eating focus on their meals
- Choose a time in the day when they are most alert and make sure the person is sitting upright when they're eating

### How can HILS help?

- Our Community Team delivery staff can plate meals, arrange cutlery, and open lids for our clients - let us know if you think this may be helpful



## Keeping Hydrated

Drinking plenty is important for everyone.

### How can HILS help?

- We give all our clients a light-weight water jug that holds 1.5 litres, which is a perfect size for the fridge. They should aim to drink this amount each day. If they don't have a free jug, please call your local Support Team. We can also send out a poster with Hydration top tips.

## Taste changes

Sometimes people with dementia may experience taste changes and many people find they prefer sweeter foods. It is helpful to know what foods they like and dislike, and what time they are most likely to eat better. If their eating habits become very restrictive, it is worth speaking to their GP.

### How can you help?

- Try offering different types of foods, even ones they have never tried before
- Always offer pudding even if they haven't finished their main meal; it is more important that they are eating something
- Try adding sweet chutneys to savoury meals

### How can HILS help?

- If we are informed about meals that are particularly liked or disliked, we can personalise the menu to meet their needs.

## Chewing difficulties and other physical problems

Some people may develop difficulties with chewing, swallowing or holding cutlery.

### How can you help?

- Try offering finger foods such as sandwiches, small pizza slices, fruit, or muffins which do not require cutlery to eat.
- Specialist cutlery, plates and other utensils are widely available. Call **HertsHelp** on **0300 123 4044** to discuss your needs.

### How can HILS help?

- If a health professional has recommended a specific textured meal, we can provide a range of modified textured meals – please ask your local Support Team
- We offer tea and breakfast menus which include finger foods such as sandwiches
- For more information on this topic, we have a dedicated booklet on chewing and eating difficulties

## Unwanted weight gain

Whilst living with dementia, some people may end up gaining weight. If they like sweet foods, fruit (fresh, tinned, or stewed) may be a healthy option. If you are concerned about someone's weight, contact their GP for advice.



## Unintentional weight loss

If you feel a person with dementia is struggling to maintain their weight or is losing weight, get in touch with the Nutrition & Wellbeing team for advice, and a copy of our Achieving Healthy Weight Gain booklet which you may find helpful.

If you have any particular concerns about dementia and diet, or the options on the menu, please do not hesitate to contact us. If you are a family member or friend who cares for someone with dementia, and would like to find out about the support available in your area, call HertsHelp on **0300 1234 044**.

### **We also have a selection of additional booklets and leaflets for the following health conditions:**

Diabetes, feeling forgetful, healthy heart, good bowel health, coeliac disease, kidney problems, chewing and eating difficulties, IBS, COPD, food labelling

This resource has been compiled using available current evidence and has been approved by a team of dietitians and nutritionists.

The information is for general use and should not replace individual tailored advice given by a healthcare professional.

For further information, please contact your local Support Team or visit our website on [www.hertsindependentliving.org](http://www.hertsindependentliving.org) or contact us directly through [nutrition@hertsindependentliving.org](mailto:nutrition@hertsindependentliving.org) Alternatively, please call Hertfordshire Independent Living Service on **0330 2000 103** (all calls charged at local rate).

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