

Tips for Caregivers

Be Flexible. You can have breakfast for dinner. Accept that your loved one's eating habits will change.

Keep it simple. If your loved one is having a hard time choosing from a menu, it's ok to choose for them. Offer one course at a time to reduce confusion.

Assure **dental appliances** are correctly fitted and secured.

Eat together. A big part of eating is the social aspect. Sitting across from someone who is also eating can encourage a person to keep eating.

Adapt as your loved one's abilities change. Offer finger foods when they start to have difficulty with utensils.

Hydrate. Encourage water intake throughout the day—for YOU and your loved one.

Encourage **physical activity** at every stage as it can help support a healthy appetite.



We Care

We hope that these tips are useful as you strive to provide your loved one with adequate nutrition. Please know that the staff at Care2Caregivers is available to discuss these issues and help you get connected with programs that support your health and well-being. Our dedicated, professional staff members have also been family caregivers, and they are here to listen.

HELPLINE: 800-424-2494

Comprehensive Services on Aging (COPSA) has been providing compassionate and sensitive mental health care to the elderly since 1975. A team of Geriatric Psychiatrists, Social Workers and Case Managers are available to assist families with diagnosis and treatment. COPSA also provides training for professionals, family caregivers and the community on issues related to aging, memory and mental health. Care2Caregivers provides resources, referrals, information and supportive counseling to anyone caring for someone with memory loss.

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Nutrition and Memory Loss



Rutgers Health

University Behavioral Health Care
COPSA Institute for Alzheimer's
Disease and Related Disorders



Memory Problems can impact a person's nutritional well being.

As a person progresses through the various stages of memory loss, they may also encounter challenges related to eating. We all need good nutrition to stay healthy. The person with memory loss will need extra supports to make sure they get the necessary nutrients to support their health.

In the **early stages** of memory loss, a person may have more difficulty with successfully completing the steps of meal preparation which may cause them to lose or gain an unhealthy amount of weight. They may forget what to buy when grocery shopping, have trouble fixing simple meals, difficulty using the stove, coffee pot or microwave, or simply forget to eat.

If you notice any of these changes with your loved one, it's a good idea for you to provide more assistance and supervision with eating.

During the **middle stages** of the disease, a person may forget that they may have just eaten and insist on eating again. Or they may insist they have just eaten when you know they have not eaten for a few hours. Families often report that their loved one's tastes change. Their sense of smell may not be as sharp, and everything may taste bland. Someone who didn't like sweets now just wants to eat ice cream all day, or someone who used to eat all day, doesn't seem to have much of an appetite anymore. People may get fixated on eating only certain foods and only want to eat the same thing over and over again. They may become adverse to certain textures or colors, or simply no longer want the food that is placed in front of them.

Some people may have difficulty choosing items from a menu. There may be times when a person has a hard time getting the food directly into their mouth, leading to spills on the table, the floor or their clothes. In addition, they may have little awareness that they are having a hard time.

As Memory Loss Advances

The **later stages** of dementia may bring more difficulty with chewing and swallowing. Talk with your doctor if you notice you loved one is not fully chewing their food or coughing when eating. A consultation with a specialist may help you figure out the best food options for this stage. Options may include cutting food into small pieces, offering finger foods or foods that are soft or pureed. Hospice staff are a wonderful resource regarding feeding options toward the end of life.



Eating together at every stage is important.