



Nutrition Fact Sheet

Why Nutrition Is Important In Dementia

According to Dementia Australia, it is estimated that 52% of consumers in aged care homes are affected by dementia. Dementia can significantly contribute to an individual's nutrition and health status, and therefore ensuring adequate nutrition for this group is extremely important.

In this fact sheet, we discuss the significance of quality nutrition in dementia care, as well as strategies to help ensure individuals with dementia are well nourished and meeting their nutritional requirements.

HOW DOES DEMENTIA AFFECT NUTRITIONAL STATUS?

Malnutrition is a major health issue facing consumers in aged care homes. When an individual has dementia, some additional challenges can occur making it difficult to meet nutritional requirements.

The challenges faced by individuals living with dementia include:

- Forgetting to eat and drink
- Reduction in appetite
- Change in activity levels ie pacing/wandering
- Losing sense of taste and smell
- Difficulty using cutlery
- Reduced ability to recognise meals and drinks offered
- Dry mouth
- Forgetting how to chew and swallow
- Regular changes in likes and dislikes of certain foods

FORGETTING TO EAT AND DRINK

Forgetting to eat and drink is one of the largest contributors of malnutrition affecting individuals living with dementia. Having easy-to-eat snacks that do not need to be refrigerated made available and placed in a position that is easily accessible by consumers, can help to combat this issue. Snacks could include biscuits, scrolls, pastries, slices or sandwiches depending on the consumers preference.

CHANGES IN APPETITE AND ACTIVITY LEVELS

Many individuals with dementia can find that a reduction in appetite occurs. For individuals who also experience symptoms such as pacing and wandering, energy requirements increase further and can therefore make it even more difficult to meet nutritional goals.

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For those consumers who are losing weight or are below the healthy weight range, providing high energy and high protein food choices at both main and mid meals can be beneficial in weight management. This could include using extra oils, margarines and butters in cooking, using full fat dairy products and fortifying meals with nutritional supplements such as AdVital or Sustagen Neutral.

In addition to this, avoiding restrictive diets such as low fat or diabetic diets (unless specified by a GP or dietitian) is important to provide the consumers with the greatest opportunity to meet their energy and protein needs.

REDUCED TASTE AND SMELL

The use of herbs and spices in cooking can help to intensify the flavour of the meal. For individuals with reduced taste and smell, this can lead to increased enjoyment of the meal, which can in turn improve consumption levels and aid with weight gain and management.

DIFFICULTY USING CUTLERY

Some individuals with dementia can have difficulty using cutlery. As such, offering finger foods that are nutritious and easy to eat can help to improve oral intake. This could include offering crumpets, mini pizzas, scones, mini pastries, party pies, fruit toast, cheese sticks, french toast fingers, potato chips, wedges and fritters.

Eating requires a level of concentration that someone with dementia may find difficult to maintain. Consumers may benefit from a simplified plate setting by only offering one plate at a time, limiting the use of different crockery and glasses, and ensuring that food and drink is served separately. In some individuals this may help to improve oral intake, as it can avoid confusion and reduce distractions.



For more information, please contact the dietitian team at dietitian@catercare.com.au

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