



## Patient/carer information: Eating and drinking for people with dementia – Finger food

Some people with dementia can find it difficult to eat using cutlery.

Finger foods are foods that can be eaten easily with hands instead of cutlery, and offering these can help prolong independence at mealtimes.

Offering finger foods can also help to improve food intake between meals.

Finger foods should be easy to eat by hand and should be served at a temperature that is safe for the person with dementia i.e. hot (but not hot enough to burn), cold or at room temperature. People can eat finger foods at their own pace so if it takes someone a long time to eat, serving only foods at room temperature may be best. Finger foods can also be really helpful for people who find it difficult to sit at a table to eat a meal or who walk a lot.

If the person with dementia has swallowing difficulties it is important to be aware that many finger foods may not be suitable. Some people may also find it difficult to eat dry foods such as cereal bars or chicken nuggets.

### **The importance of a balanced diet**

Our bodies need us to eat a range of different foods every day. These include:

- Starchy carbohydrate such as bread, pasta, rice, cereals, potatoes
- Protein such as meat, fish, eggs, nuts, beans/lentils, Quorn, soya
- Milk and milk containing foods such as yogurt, fromage frais, cheese
- Fruit and vegetables
- Fluid

### **Tips for serving a balanced finger food diet**

- Aim for about 3 small meals and 2-3 between meal snacks each day
- Try to serve 2-3 portions of protein foods every day
- Try to serve 2-3 portions of milk and milk containing foods every day
- Try to serve a portion of starchy foods at each meal
- Try to serve some fruit and vegetables every day – aim for 5 small portions per day
- Encourage at least 6-8 glasses/mugs of fluid every day

### **Drinks:**

If the person with dementia finds it difficult to drink enough, drinks can be served as frozen slushy drinks, ice lollies or sorbets in cones, which may be easier for the person with dementia to handle.

Drinks that also contain some nutrition are often a good choice.

- Try serving:
- Fortified milk
  - Malted milk drinks
  - Fruit smoothies
  - Fruit juice
  - Hot chocolate
  - Tea or coffee (made with fortified milk)

**Fortified milk -**  
mix 4 tablespoons  
of dried, skimmed  
milk powder into a  
pint of full fat milk

### **Tips for preparing finger foods:**

- Choose foods that are robust, moist and not too messy
- Serve food in pieces that are easy to hold with the fingers and the size of 1 – 2 bites
- Make sure finger foods look attractive on the plate
- Mini versions of buffet foods designed to be eaten by hand may be easier for the person with dementia to manage rather than cut up larger versions e.g. quiche, pork pie, scotch eggs
- Lots of foods can be served as finger foods, you don't have to just serve buffet type food

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**Breakfast food ideas:**

- Buttered toast or bread fingers with spread (see below)
- Pieces of buttered crumpet, English muffin, brioche with spread (see below)
- Dried fruit e.g. dates or apricots
- Sausages
- Hard boiled eggs
- Pieces of firm omelette
- Eggly bread/French toast squares
- Pancake rolled with filling (see below)

**Ideas for sandwich fillings and spreads for bread/crackers/muffins/crumpets etc**

- Pate, cheese spread, cream cheese, tuna mayonnaise, egg mayonnaise, peanut butter, grated cheese mixed with mayonnaise, fish or meat paste
- Jam, marmalade, honey or chocolate spread

**Main meal and snack ideas****Protein foods:**

- Cubes or thick slices of quorn or cooked meat e.g. ham, beef or chicken
- Chicken nuggets
- Fish fingers/fish cakes/crab sticks, breaded fish
- Mini hamburgers/beef burgers
- Meatballs/slices of meat loaf
- Sausages/pigs in blankets (sausages wrapped in bacon)
- Buffet type food such as mini quiche, small slice of pizza, small pork pie, sausage roll, small scotch egg, samosa or bhaji
- Hardboiled eggs
- Pieces of firm omelette or Spanish omelette
- Cheese cubes

**Starchy carbohydrate foods:**

- Potato – chips, wedges, waffles, new, roast, jacket
- Bread, chapattis, crumpets, tortillas
- Cheese straws, savoury biscuits, bread sticks
- Yorkshire pudding

**Vegetables (not high in calories or protein but an important part of the diet):**

- Cherry tomatoes, tomato wedges
- Steamed or raw vegetable fingers or spears e.g. cauliflower or broccoli florets, carrots, green beans
- Cucumber slices or sticks
- Pepper slices
- Sweet potato wedges
- Button mushrooms

**Pudding or sweet snack ideas:**

- Mini fruit pie, egg custard tart, jam tart
- Sponge pudding cut into chunks
- Cold bread and butter pudding square
- Slice of buttered malt loaf or fruit loaf
- Pieces of buttered tea cakes
- Pieces of buttered crumpet, English muffin, scone or drop scone
- Small cake, bun or American muffin
- Cereal bar or flapjack
- Buttered toast or bread fingers with spread (see above)
- Small cookies or biscuits
- Pancake rolled with filling e.g. peanut butter or chocolate spread

**Fruit: (not high in calories or protein but an important part of the diet):**

- Banana – whole, chunks or slices
- Melon chunks
- Strawberries, raspberries, grapes
- Orange segments
- Slices of apple, pineapple, mango
- Ready to eat dried apricots, prunes, pears, apple

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**For more information see:**

- Alzheimer's Society [www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)
- Caroline Walker Trust (2011). [Eating Well: Supporting older people and older people with dementia](#)