



At Arbor Springs we are dedicated to helping families manage the realities of dementia with as much love, dignity, and knowledge as possible. This monthly e-newsletter is our way of offering helpful tips and insights that will hopefully make your days with your loved one a little easier, happier, and calm.

"Food is the heart of the home and most often one of our life's daily pleasures." LaVrene Norton, from *Nourish the Body and Soul*

Unfortunately for those with dementia, eating can become a difficult task and the whole dining experience can become very overwhelming and frustrating. Dementia can lead to reduced food and fluid intake because of decreased recognition of hunger and thirst, problems swallowing, and difficulty using dining utensils. Poor nutrition for a person with Alzheimer's can then lead to weight loss and an increase in behavioral symptoms.

The following tips will promote the independence and dignity of your loved one at mealtime, while ultimately providing a more pleasurable experience for both of you.

- > Provide a calm, comfortable dining atmosphere. Too much noise within the environment can be overwhelming for the person with dementia. This is because their brains are unable to process all of the incoming sensory information. The television should be off and soft instrumental music can often be a soothing backdrop. Keep the temperature controlled. It is common for people with dementia to say they are cold, so a sweater or lap blanket should be provided as needed.
- > Provide color contrast. People with dementia have increased visual deficits including difficulty with depth perception. Table settings should provide for adequate color contrast between the plate and table and between the food and the plate. For example, serving a darker toned food item on a white plate helps to distinguish the food from the plate.
- > Promote independence. Serving one food at a time and smaller portions can be less overwhelming. Use verbal prompts to encourage eating. Prepare foods that are easier to chew and swallow. Cut foods into smaller pieces before serving them. Adapt dishes and utensils to make eating easier. Use light weight cups for those whose muscle tone has weakened. You might serve food in a bowl instead of a plate, or try using a plate with a rim. A spoon with a large handle may be less difficult to handle than a fork, or even let the person use his or her hands if it's easier. Try bite-sized foods that are easy to pick up, such as chicken nuggets, fish sticks, or orange slices.
- > Give the person plenty of time to eat. The pace of the meal should be slow with prompts provided to remind the person to take a drink and to chew and swallow. You also might need to

use a "watch me" technique. For example, hold a spoon and show your loved one how to take a bite of cereal. Keep in mind that it may take an hour or longer to finish eating.

> Eat together. Research suggests that people eat better when they are in the company of others. In many homes the kitchen table is not just where people eat but a social hub. Family and friends gather for a chat and have discussions over a cup of coffee. Meals should continue to be an enjoyable social event and an opportunity to engage with your loved one. Conversational tone should be kept positive and may include topics such as reminiscing, childhood, gardens, or food and cooking.

By following these dining tips, you are encouraging your loved one to maintain his or her independence, which enhances his or her self esteem and morale. Furthermore, by providing a feel-good interactive environment, self isolation is decreased and overall attitude improves, which ultimately lessens negative behaviors.

If you have specific questions that you would like answered in an upcoming issue of this e-newsletter please reach out to Monica Kuehl, RN, BSN, Director of Marketing @ [m.kuehl@arborsprings.org](mailto:m.kuehl@arborsprings.org) or 515-223-1135 and I'll do my best to get to them all.