

A GUIDE TO MANAGING HEALTH & NUTRITION ON THE DEMENTIA DIET



Weight Loss and Dementia
Preventing Weight Loss
Bravo Dining By Serenades
Feel Good Finger Foods



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Weight Loss and Dementia

In addition to memory loss and behavior changes, people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias are at a very high risk of weight loss despite having regular access to food. The complex system of hormones is disrupted in the brain.

Managing the symptoms and causes of **weight loss associated with dementia** are challenging. That's because indicators that signal to healthy people that it's time to eat—a growling stomach, lightheadedness, fatigue—do not register the same way in a person with dementia. Brain cells triggered by hormones do not make the connection between hunger and food as well as they once did. In the later stages, dementia can even affect the ability to chew and swallow, creating more challenges.

There are many causes of poor appetite and weight loss in people with dementia:

- **Medications.** The side effect of medications used to treat the symptoms of dementia and Alzheimer's disease may cause unwanted weight loss, including neurologics, cardiac and endocrine drugs.
- **Medical Conditions.** Coexisting medical conditions such as diabetes, thyroid disease, constipation, cancer, heart disease, kidney disease and even dental issues can cause weight loss. Dysphagia—or difficulty swallowing—is also tied to weight loss.
- **Hormone Dysregulation.** When the body needs nourishment, neurotransmitters are released, sending messages to the brain that signal hunger. When brain cells are damaged by dementia, this complex system of chemicals and hormones is disrupted.
- **Cognitive Changes.** **Neurological changes** in the brain occur when electrical signals and neurons are inhibited by dementia. For this reason, people with dementia may struggle to remember or identify food on the plate.
- **Sensory Dysfunction.** Changes in visual and spatial abilities and diminished gustatory perception (taste) make eating more challenging. Food on the plate may be difficult to see or may smell differently.
- **Behavioral Disorders.** Easily overwhelmed, agitated, and frustrated due to changes in the brain, the common symptoms and behaviors of dementia can prevent people from getting proper nutrition while demanding larger amounts of energy.
- **Depression.** **Depression** is an easily overlooked symptom of Alzheimer's disease and dementia and is known to cause weight loss.



If you or your loved one are experiencing a loss of appetite, it is important to consult your doctor to determine the cause of weight loss and explore your treatment options.

Preventing Weight Loss

While there are many contributing factors, the cognitive and **behavioral changes**, hormone dysregulation and sensory dysfunction in the body and brain all converge to disrupt appetite, leading to weight loss in people with dementia.

Dementia caregivers often find it necessary to adapt food choices and eating strategies to meet a person's changing needs, preferences and abilities and help them maintain a healthy weight.

There are many techniques you can try at home to encourage healthier eating habits, improve nutrition, and prevent weight loss. It is important to try several different approaches to see what works best for you.

As always, talk to your doctor to help you devise the right plan for you and your loved one.

- **Supplements.** If you or a loved one are experiencing weight loss caused by dementia, ask your doctor if supplements can add calories or nutrients to the diet.
- **Position.** Even the physical activity of chewing can interfere with eating and increase the risk of choking associated with dementia. Sitting up straight in a chair may provide some assistance.
- **Caloric Intake.** High calorie foods including protein shakes may help offset weight loss challenges, but some drinks may lack proper nutrition, so be sure to ask your doctor.
- **Favorite Foods.** Food can taste differently to people with dementia. Offer up a variety of options including your loved one's favorite recipes until you find something they like.
- **Frequent Snacking.** Making food and snacks available throughout the day provide more opportunities to eat, increasing food intake.
- **Smaller Portions.** Foods that are easier to bite, chew and swallow can encourage eating. Cut all solid foods into smaller bite-sized portions and serve them more frequently throughout the day.
- **Serving Solutions.** Easier to hold and consume, dementia caregivers have found that finger foods are often preferred by people with dementia.
- **Education.** Researchers have found that **nutritional education programs** for caregivers is one of the best ways to prevent weight loss.



If your loved one has difficulty opening their mouth or chewing, ask your doctor if an occupational therapist can help. Poor appetite can lead to dangerous medical problems such as dehydration.

Bravo Dining by Serenades

As part of Bravo Dining, certified dementia caregivers at Serenades Memory Care are **specially trained** to leverage the powerful sense of smell, sight, hearing and taste to encourage appetite and promote better nutrition.



In the person with dementia, feelings associated with hunger are no longer interpreted by the brain in the same way as the healthy brain. Taste diminishes over time and favorite foods may no longer be appealing. Vision may become impaired, making it more difficult to locate food on the plate. Fine motor skills make eating more challenging. Even one's sense of smell wanes, reducing the positive effects of aroma on appetite.

Bravo Dining by Sonata Senior Living combats these challenges by incorporating research-based techniques to trigger neurons in the brain and reinforce the connection between hunger and food.

- **Vision.** People with dementia struggle to process visual data, including contrast and depth perception. Bravo Dining uses colorful dishware and placemats to create more contrast and help food stand out on the plate. Table caddies provide visual cues to signal mealtime and smaller portions reduce anxiety caused by a crowded plate.
- **Smell.** Sense of smell is often compromised, further contributing to weight loss. Bravo Dining uses aromatherapy, including use of essential oils and scented washcloths, to engage the sense of smell. Meals are prepared family-style in large cookware and warmed on induction heating tiles to simulate the look and feel of a family kitchen and get the gastric juices flowing.
- **Touch.** People with dementia may lack motor coordination, further derailing eating. In Bravo Dining, food is chopped into smaller bites to support independent eating. Food is often served warm since waiting for food to cool can further deter or defer eating.
- **Taste and Dementia.** When taste sensitivity declines, people with dementia are less likely to eat food they once enjoyed. Bravo Dining prepares residents' favorite foods and offers abundant choices to appeal to changing preferences as disease progresses.
- **Hearing and Dementia.** Noise can disrupt an eating routine in a person with dementia. In Bravo Dining, noisy distractions such as TV are removed while the **power of music** is used to calm residents who may become frustrated and agitated around mealtime.



While there is still much to learn about Alzheimer's disease and weight loss, **Serenades Memory Care** incorporates the latest science and research into innovative programming for better nutritional outcomes.


Serenades Memory Care

Dementia care experts at Serenades have developed strategies that can help families struggling with mealtime challenges. This includes adapting food choices to meet changing preferences and abilities and offering nutrient-dense items.

As part of the **dementia diet**, finger foods promote independence during the middle to late stages of the disease when eating becomes more difficult. That's because finger foods are easier to pick up and can be eaten and chewed without the need for cutlery, which helps those with limited coordination maintain control and preserve dignity.

At **Serenades Memory Care**, meals are made into a variety of nutritious and tasty forms, while packing in essential nutrients, antioxidants and vitamins to help residents maintain a healthy weight.

- **Toast.** For those battling weight loss, toast topped with cheese or toast spread with jam and peanut butter can boost calories between meals.
- **Mini Foods.** From mini-pizzas to mini-quiches and mini-samosa, vegetable toppings like broccoli, tomatoes and mushrooms are an easy way to sneak in added nutrients.
- **Chopped Fruit.** Most fruits can be cut into bite-sized chunks to provide essential antioxidants proven to promote brain health, including grapes, bananas, berries, oranges, cantaloupe, watermelon, mangos, and papaya.
- **Muffins.** Pack a **protein punch** in a muffin filled with anything from ham and zucchini to pumpkin and quinoa, plus they can be frozen! Cereal bars also help supplement essential grains.
- **Mug Foods.** An underrated form of dishware that does not require a fork or spoon, a mug is easy to hold and fill with both nutritious and delicious foods like oatmeal and omelets.
- **Tortillas.** Whole wheat tortillas can be filled with eggs, sausage, and tofu and virtually any vegetable that can roll into a sandwich wrap.
- **Nuggets.** Some protein-dense foods were just meant to be eaten with your fingers such as chicken nuggets, fish fingers and hard-boiled eggs. Air fry or bake them to reduce fat content.
- **Grind Dining.** Serenades Memory Care is pioneering an innovative, new "grind dining" program. The ingredients of a traditional meal, including proteins, grains, vegetables, and seasonings, are ground together, re-shaped and baked into finger foods like patties, meatballs, dumplings or pastries. The method helps restore dignity and enjoyment in mealtime.



Finger foods can help your loved one retain their independence and prevent dangerous **weight loss caused by dementia**. The key is to provide creative, varied and attractive options that are easy to hold and consume on the go.



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