

# Mealtime Tips



Mealtimes can be a challenge for the elderly, particularly those with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, stroke sufferers and those with other physically disabling conditions. Here are some tips for getting through mealtimes. You can determine which are appropriate in your particular situation.

## REDUCE DISTRACTIONS

- ✘ Keep place settings simple.
- ✘ Keep unnecessary clutter off the table.
- ✘ Use plain plates and a bare table/simple tablecloth.

## SIMPLIFY EATING

- ✘ Serve finger foods and other easy-to-eat foods.
- ✘ Place a damp washcloth beneath the plate to prevent it from sliding.
- ✘ Use cups with lids and spouts or bendable straws.
- ✘ Provide only necessary utensils.
- ✘ Use bowls instead of plates.
- ✘ Make sure bowls and plates are a different color than the placemat.



## TO HELP SOMEONE EAT

- ✘ Use special flatware, such as swivel spoons, flatware with long handles, or flatware with built-up handles.
- ✘ Use a plate guard, which helps keep food from spilling off the plate.
- ✘ Make sure the person is propped up, if in bed, or in a comfortable sitting position at a table.
- ✘ Provide a wet washcloth for washing hands and a hand towel for drying.

- ✘ Tuck a napkin under their chin.
- ✘ Watch for tiredness and lack of eating.
- ✘ Guard against their eating too fast, which can cause choking.
- ✘ Help only if needed.

## TIME MEALS EFFECTIVELY

- ✘ Try to have meals at regular, scheduled times every day.
- ✘ Make sure the person is not in pain.
- ✘ Do not schedule meals after treatments such as chemotherapy that may cause stomach upset.

## TO FEED SOMEONE

- ✘ Wash your hands.
- ✘ Sit close to the bed or to the person's chair.
- ✘ Tuck a napkin under the person's chin; do not call it a "bib," which has demeaning connotations.
- ✘ Ask the person when they are ready to eat.
- ✘ Use a spoon and give food from the tip, not the side.
- ✘ Let the person swallow before offering another spoonful.
- ✘ Use a straw in a glass for offering liquids.
- ✘ Wipe the person's mouth and offer water for rinsing their mouth.

## FOR SOMEONE WITH CHEWING PROBLEMS:

- ✘ Apply light pressure on their lips or under their chin before eating.
- ✘ Say, "Chew now," and "Swallow now."
- ✘ Avoid sticky foods like peanut butter and bananas.
- ✘ Avoid hard foods and food with tough skins.
- ✘ Moisten foods.

## FOR SOMEONE WITH SWALLOWING PROBLEMS

- ✘ Remind them to swallow after each bite.
- ✘ Gently stroke their throat.
- ✘ Check their mouth for food stored in the cheek.
- ✘ Feed them slowly.
- ✘ Offer them liquids at room temperature.
- ✘ Moisten the foods.