



A Caregivers' Guide

Managing Mealtimes with Alzheimer's Disease

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About Caregivers Kitchen

Chef Beth Scholer CC, CDM, CFPP founded Caregivers Kitchen after working with home care and home health companies where she taught direct care staff kitchen skills including food safety, nutrition for older adults, meal planning, managing chronic conditions and cooking favorite meals. She witnessed the direct impact of the training as those caregivers cared for her grandmother, who wanted to stay in her home. Caregivers Kitchen's mission is to provide caregivers with the skills and knowledge to prepare and serve safe, healthful and delicious meals to those in their care. It is accomplished through online nutrition, food safety and cooking skills training and instructor-led cooking classes. Caregivers' accomplishments are recognized through Certificates of Achievement in different program areas.

Learn more about Caregivers Kitchen online www.caregiverskitchen.net



Learn cooking skills, mealtime tips and new recipes though online, interactive learning for these topics and more! Check out the [Caregivers Kitchen course catalog](#) for more information. Contact sales@caregiverskitchen.net for group pricing.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Caregivers Kitchen. Thank you for learning how nutrition and cooking for chronic conditions can positively impact those you care for.

Food is one of the great comforts elders can still enjoy, even for those with chronic conditions. As they experience changes to physical or mental health, having choice in meals can provide a sense of personal control, familiarity and comfort.

Many elders have wonderful memories from cooking and eating meals with their family. As their caregiver, you can keep those memories alive. Take time to learn about the elders' food preferences and traditions . Do your best to meet their expectations and serve meals that are meaningful.

As a caregiver, knowing more about how food choices impact the chronic condition will help you provide the best care. Partner with the elder to help them make an informed choice about meals and find alternatives so they can still enjoy favorite foods. Doing so can lessen complications associated with chronic disease like hospitalization and allow them to feel better everyday.

Join Caregivers Kitchen on our mission to improve elders' quality of life by managing mealtime in their home.

Warm wishes and happy cooking

Chef Beth and the Caregivers Kitchen Team

PART ONE

Nutrition and Safe Consumption



For those with Alzheimer's or other types of dementia, mealtime is one of many daily challenges. Individuals are unique in personality and preference and each course of the disease is different. As a caregiver, it's crucial to be attentive to the elder's needs and flexible with their care.

Dementia in Many Forms

Dementia is not a specific disease, but a collection of symptoms that can be caused by different disorders that affect the brain. Individuals with dementia experience impaired mental function that affects daily activities and personal relationships. They may lose control of emotions, experience changes to personality and have behavioral problems.

While memory loss is a common symptom of dementia, memory loss by itself does not mean that a person has dementia. Although it is common in very elderly individuals, dementia is not a normal part of the aging process.

Some of the conditions that can cause symptoms of dementia include:

- Alzheimer's disease
- Vascular dementia
- Lewy body
- Frontotemporal dementia
- Huntington's disease or Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease
- Reactions to medication, nutritional deficiencies, infections and many others

Most Common Cause

Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia in people over 65 years of age. Changes to the brain's structure are associated with Alzheimer's disease. Plaques and tangles form on nerve cells and cause neurons to stop working correctly. When neurons lose connections, they begin to die.

The loss of neuron connections will affect memory, reasoning, language, motor skills and personality. Damage to the brain starts before symptoms are noticed and progresses into late stages of the disease.

Mealtime with Alzheimer's

This unit will address making mealtime better for those with Alzheimer's disease but the same principles can be applied to most causes of dementia.

Focus on these four areas when preparing and serving meals:

- Ensure that the elder is getting enough nutrition and hydration through food and beverage choices.
- Make sure that the food and drinks are consumed safely
- Make accommodations so elders can eat as independently as possible.
- Serve food that the elder enjoys and appeals to their senses.

The ultimate goal to succeed in all areas when serving meals to an elder with Alzheimer's. This is very difficult because the disease is always progressing and changing. As a caregiver you have to balance mealtime safety and independence with adequate nutrition and food preference. Choose what is best for the elder at this point in the disease.

Complex Condition

As we discuss the four areas in more detail, keep in mind that this is a complex condition. As the disease progresses, continued damage to the brain will affect personality, motor skills and behaviors in different ways. When providing care, approach each individual and case uniquely.

GUIDELINES OF ALZHEIMER'S CARE

- Elders in early stages of Alzheimer's will respond differently than those in mid-to-late stages.
- A modification that worked previously may not work as the disease progresses.
- Managing mealtime will require some trial and error.
- Try different ideas and be flexible to find the best solution.

Adequate Nutrition

Good nutrition is important to overall health. Focus on meeting nutritional needs so elders have energy for daily activities. Just like your need gas to drive your car, elders need calories from wholesome food to power their body and brain.

Eating well supports a healthy immune system and reduces other chronic disease like cardiovascular disease or diabetes. A well nourished body will respond better to medical treatments. Eating enough calories will also help to maintain weight or minimize weight loss.

Studies suggest eating a variety of nutrients can reduce behavior problems. Protein, unsaturated fats and vitamins and minerals reduce depression and improve mental health.

Planning Meals

Individuals with Alzheimer's don't need a special diet. Meals should include a variety of foods and beverages from all food groups. Including favorite foods will encourage them to eat better. For those advanced in age or in late stages of the disease, making changes to the kinds of food they are used too can cause confusion or behavior problems. Use your best judgment for balancing nutrition while respecting food preference.

Follow recommendations from **MyPlate for Older Adults** for food choices and serving sizes. Include these different food groups:

- Make one half of the plate fruits and vegetables including canned or frozen produce.
- Focus on whole grain foods like oatmeal or whole grain bread.
- Include lean protein from fish, beef, chicken, eggs, nuts and beans.
- Aim for 3 servings of low fat dairy like milk, yogurt and cheese.
- Limit saturated fats from butter or high fat meat.

Cut down on refined sugars from processed foods because they are high in calories but low in other nutrients like vitamins and minerals and fiber. Watch nutrition labels for sodium and limit foods high in salt.

For extra flavor in food, season with herbs and spices, or marinades and use flavorful cooking methods like roasting, broiling or braising.

Suggested Recipe: Seasoned Steamed Vegetables.

Focus on Fluids

Drinking enough fluids is also very important for good health. Older adults and those with Alzheimer's are at an increased risk for **dehydration**, or the loss of water and electrolytes from the body.

Just like the loss of smell and taste, the sense of thirst is reduced with age. Many times older adults do not feel thirsty or do not remember to drink. They are also fear urinary incontinence and avoid drinking. Becoming dehydrated puts them at higher risk for falls, urinary tract infections, confusion and behavior issues.

To increase fluids, try these tips:

- Encourage the pattern of taking 5 bites and then 1 drink. This helps with fluid intake and also helps clear food from the mouth.
- Sip throughout the day instead of drinking a whole glass at once. Keep a pitcher or mug in sight and in reach.
- Have the elder drink a cup of water after an activity that is done each day, like brushing teeth or getting dressed. Even if they have trouble remembering, this is behavior that can be learned.
- Serve low-sugar beverages like milk, 100% fruit or vegetable juice and water.
- Limit caffeine from regular coffee and tea. Serve decaffeinated if they are still requested.
- And remember that foods add moisture. Serve fruits and vegetables, soups and smoothies to increase fluid intake.

Addressing Poor Appetite

Decreases in appetite are associated with growing older but it may be worsened by Alzheimer's or dementia. Consider these causes of poor appetite:

- Food doesn't taste as good as it once did because of changes to the sense of smell and taste. Improve the flavor with cooking methods like roasting or grilling and season food with herbs, spices or sauces.
- Food may not be recognized. Try serving simple, familiar foods and remind the elder that it is a favorite of theirs.

- New medications or changes to the dose can cause upset stomach or affect the appetite. Inform the care team if you suspect medication-related changes.
- Poorly fitting dentures can make chewing painful and the elder may not be able to tell you. Check that the dentures are in correctly and visit the dentist regularly.
- Lack of exercise or physical activity will decrease calorie needs. Encourage simple activities like going for a walk or gardening.
- Sadness or loneliness over changes to relationships or health cause a loss of interest in eating. Sit with the elder during meals or have family visit at dinnertime to encourage eating better.

Serve Food Safely

Along with ensuring that the elder is getting enough to eat and drink, the food needs be safe for them to consume. This includes following safe food handling practices to prevent food borne illness and following prescription diets for other medical conditions. Make sure the size of food and its texture and consistency can be safely chewed and swallowed and the size of the bites or speed of eating will not cause choking or aspiration.

Prevent Foodborne Illness

Prepare and handle food safely to prevent illness. Follow these simple guidelines for safe food.

- Always follow good personal hygiene practices like wearing a clean apron, taking jewelry off the hands and wrists and washing hands often when preparing food.
- Keep the work area clean by washing dishes, utensils and surfaces often.
- Prevent cross contamination by separating raw from ready-to-eat foods.
- Cook foods to safe temperatures, especially meat, poultry and fish.
- Put cold foods away quickly so bacteria doesn't have a chance to grow .
- Its also very important to clean out the refrigerator often and dispose of spoiled food.

Follow Prescription Diets

Prescription diets are special meal plans given by a doctor or dietician to help manage medical conditions like high blood pressure or heart failure. Common diet prescriptions' include carbs choices for those with diabetes and low sodium or restricted fluids for heart or kidney disease, gluten-free for those with celiac disease and allergen-free.

They should be followed as closely as possible. In some cases where the elder is not eating well, the diet may be relaxed. Work with the care team before making changes to the diet. Diet restrictions for food allergies **MUST** be followed. Food allergy reactions can be life threatening.

Prevent Choking

Alzheimer's can impact the part of the brain that controls the body's ability to chew and swallow. This reflex is commonly affected in mid to late stages of the disease. Stroke or other illness can also affect chewing or swallowing.

To prevent choking or aspiration, where food or drink gets into the lungs, follow these guidelines:

- Make sure the elder is fully awake and alert before serving meals.

- Position the elder upright in a chair and close to the table. The hips should be back in the chair and the weight centered.

- Use a chair with arm rests for support and slightly tuck the chin when eating or drinking.

- Remind the elder to eat slowly, chew carefully and not talk with food in the mouth. Watch closely for any signs of choking.

- Always check the mouth after eating for any food left pocketed in the cheeks (late stages.)

Reducing Choking Risk

If the elder has difficulty with chewing or swallowing, consider foods that have a lower choking risk. Always be close at mealtime to watch for trouble with chewing or swallowing.

Serve with Caution	Better Choices
Hot dogs, sausages, chunks of meat	Minced or ground meat, flaked fish
Raw fruit or vegetables	Cooked fruit and vegetables
Corn, peas or black beans	Soups (without chunky vegetables)
Hard or chewy candy	Pudding or gelatin
Nuts or seeds	Applesauce
Peanut butter on white bread	Peanut butter mixed with jam on toasted bread
Soft bread or starchy pasta	Toasted bread or pasta with extra sauce
Round foods like grapes or meatballs	Cut round foods in half or quarters
Chips or crackers	Ice cream or popsicles
Plain water	Thickened water or beverages

Source: CDSS

Modifying Texture

You can still serve the elder's favorite foods if you modify the size or texture. Make sure all food is cut into bite size pieces. If serving meat, slice thin like deli meat and then cut into bite sized pieces. Cut round meat like hotdogs or sausages in half lengthwise and slice into small pieces.

If an elder has trouble chewing, modify the texture so it can be easily swallowed. Mash, shred, grind, blend or puree foods for easy consumption. Serve foods that have a moist consistency to ease swallowing. Serve braised vegetables and meats that have been cooked with liquid, and add sauces or gravies to pureed meats .

When serving drinks, give half cup portions for less chance of aspiration. Follow up with another half cup serving.

Suggested Recipe: Chicken Medallions in White Wine Sauce

Speed of Eating

Awareness of time is lost with Alzheimer's and they may eat quickly without regard to safety. Follow these tips for safe consumption.

- Always check the temperature of food just before it is served. Make sure it is not so hot that it can burn mouth if it is eaten immediately.
- If an elder is eating too fast and not chewing or swallowing between bites, put just enough food on the plate for one bite. Use a small plate so the amount still looks "normal".
- Discourage "big bites" by cutting food up and using small utensils for eating and drinking.

PART TWO

Maintaining Independence and Honoring Preference



Alzheimer's can devastate an elder by robbing them of the ability to use eating utensils or feed themselves. The loss of "being in control" leads to frustration and discouragement for the elder and caregiver. Making some simple changes to mealtime can help the elder regain some personal control and enjoy preferred foods.

Maintaining Independence

With regard to independence at mealtime, it's important to match the elder's physical and mental abilities with the correct level of personal control.

Independence can be encouraged in the following ways:

- Giving cues on how to eat.
- Allowing enough time to eat before trying to assist.
- Providing adaptive equipment like plates, cups and utensils.
- Serving finger foods.

Action and Verbal Cues

Showing and telling the elder how to eat can help with their sense of independence in the early stages of Alzheimer's. Try these tips:

- Sit at the table during mealtime and demonstrate an action by saying "watch me".
- Encourage them by saying "try the soup" and then point to the soup.
- Be patient during meals and allow enough time for eating independently before offering help.
- Always be close to watch the speed at which they are eating, the size of the bites and any signs of choking.

Mealtime Hygiene

Creating a sense of independence is more important than neatness at mealtime. Place attention on the elder's ability to feed themselves but follow these guidelines:

- Use a neck scarf or lab bib to keep clothes cleaner. Show respect and keep the elder's dignity in mind when putting on scarves or bibs.
- Serve beverages in mugs with handles and covered with lids to reduce spilling.
- In mid-to-late stages, the ability to actively feed themselves may be lost. If you assist with feeding, don't scrape food from mouth or lips.
- Offer a warm, moist cloth for cleaning the lips and face after eating.

Adaptive Equipment

Adaptive equipment can also increase independence at mealtime. Look for cups with a nose cut out. Sloped sides on plates and bowls help with scooping the food. Plates and bowls may also have non-skid holders to keep them from moving around on the table. Spoons, forks and knives should have large textured handles for easy gripping and the red color helps the elder see the difference between the food and the utensils.



Finger Foods

If using spoons and forks becomes too difficult, encourage independent eating by serving bite-sized finger foods. Have the elder wash her hands before mealtime to reduce the spread of disease.

- Serve sandwiches that have been cut into quarters or smaller pieces.
- Try small pieces of canned peaches or mandarin oranges, cooked carrots or sweet potato and other fruits and vegetables.
- For protein, serve small pieces of chicken, fish sticks or cheese cubes. Avoid anything with bone like chicken drumsticks or bone in steaks or chops.

Suggested Recipe: Black Bean Quesadillas

Honoring Food Preference

The final consideration with mealtime is serving the elders favorites or food preferences. Meals should look, smell and taste good to them. Know what they expect with when and how the meal is served. Do your best to meet those expectations. Set the table with only necessary items, serving small amounts or using single item service help prevent confusion.

Serve Favorite Foods

Serving familiar and favorite foods will help an elder to get needed nutrition. Keep in mind that they may not remember what their favorites are or that taste preferences may change. Remember to be flexible.

- Aroma or the smell of food can help to stimulate the appetite. Use aromatic ingredients like garlic or onion, herbs and spices to make foods smell and taste better.
- Use cooking methods like roasting, braising and grilling to add flavor to food.
- Add a colorful garnish to help draw attention to the food. Make sure the garnish is completely edible.

Suggested Recipe: Baked Spinach and Egg Cups

Meet Expectations

Do your best to meet their dining expectations. Learn as much as you can about their dining habits before dementia and continue the traditions. Remembering mealtime traditions may help to improve symptoms and behaviors.

Serve meals at their regular times. Learn what time they usually eat breakfast; or if they have never been one to eat breakfast don't start serving it now. Are they used eating at a set table? Is the food plated or served family style? Keep as much of the same as possible.

Reduce Difficult Behaviors

A simplified table can help avoid confusion or difficult behaviors. Follow these guidelines:

- Have only items that are necessary for that meal on the table when serving. Remove any item that may be mistaken for food or drinks.
- If distraction is a problem, a bright placemat will help to highlight the meal.
- Salt, pepper, ketchup or other sauces should be stored elsewhere to prevent over use. If seasoning is required, do it away from the elder and table.
- Serve small amounts of food at a time. Many elders will become overwhelmed if a full plate of food is set in front of them.
- Try serving one food on a plate or in a bowl at one time. Have the next course within reach and keep mealtime moving. If there is a delay, the elder may think dinner is over and leave the table.

Dining Environment

Difficult behaviors appear during mealtime, consider making changes to the environment where meals are served . As with all aspects of mealtime with Alzheimer's, finding the best solution will take trial and error. Find the best solution for the elder at this point in the disease.

- Noise or other distractions can cause agitation in a individual with dementia. If the elder cannot focus on eating during mealtime, turn off the radio or tv or remove others from the room.
- Changes to the brain also affect eyesight and how shapes and colors are perceived, sufficient lighting will help the elder better see the table and food.
- Serve food on contrasting color dishes. For example, if mashed potatoes are being served, use a red or dark colored plate rather than white, where the elder may not be able to distinguish the food from the plate.
- Use a bright colored placemat to define the eating area and bring focus to the food.

About the Recipes

The recipes were selected because they are often requested by elders and families. Included are classics and comfort foods, many have been modified to reduce calories and sodium content and increase protein and fiber. Recipes were also selected to give you an opportunity to practice different cooking methods.

Recipes are written as starting point for each dish. Adjust the ingredients to accommodate food preferences, nutritional needs and food allergies. Consider an individual's culture and dining habits when planning meals and use a little creativity when seasoning and serving each dish.

Servings and Nutrition Information is listed for the recipe as written. Any change in serving amount or ingredient will modify the nutrition.

Nutrient and Ingredient Icons

- LS Low Sodium: less than 140 mg. of sodium per serving
- P Good Source of Protein: 8 g. or more protein per serving
- Fi Good Source of Fiber: 2.5 g. or more fiber per serving
- GF Gluten-Free: all ingredients are free of gluten
- V Vegetarian: containing only vegetarian ingredients



Baked Spinach and Egg Cups

P GF V

SERVES 6

Per serving: *CALORIES* 100 / *SODIUM* 190 mg

0 CARB CHOICE

These finger-friendly egg cups are a healthy start to the day. Each cup has 8 grams of protein and a full serving of vegetables. Spinach, tomato and Feta cheese are a traditional trio but substitute with your favorite vegetables and cheese combinations. This recipe makes 6 cups, but leftovers can be refrigerated up to 4 days or frozen up to 4 months.

6 eggs or 1 ½ c. egg substitute

1 ½ c. fresh spinach, chopped

1 roma tomato, diced

½ c. feta cheese crumbles (or other strong flavored cheese)

salt and pepper (optional)

cooking spray

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F and spray a 6-cup muffin pan with cooking spray.
2. Wash and chop the spinach and tomato. Divide between the muffin cups.
3. In a medium bowl, scramble the eggs until foamy, season with salt and pepper, if desired.
4. Carefully pour the eggs over the spinach and tomato. Top with feta cheese.
5. Bake for 20-22 minutes or until the egg is set and the temperature measures 160°F when measured with a food thermometer.
6. Allow to cool for 5 minutes before serving.

CONTAINS: **EGGS, MILK**

Seasoned Steamed Vegetables

LS GF V

SERVES 6

Per ½ cup serving: *CALORIES 50 / SODIUM 90 mg*

0 CARB CHOICES

Seasoned, frozen vegetables are convenient but many brands contain high amounts of sodium. This recipe uses a frozen vegetable blend and salt free seasoning to make delicious, low-sodium steamed vegetables. Use any frozen vegetable blend or salt free seasoning for variety.

16 oz. frozen vegetable blend (broccoli, cauliflower and carrot)

2 Tbsp. water

Sauce

2 Tbsp. water

2 Tbsp. stick margarine (*trans* fat free)

½ tsp. corn starch

¾ tsp. salt free seasoning blend, any flavor

1. Place frozen vegetables and 2 Tbsp. of water into a microwave safe bowl with lid. Cook on high power for 2-3 minutes. Stir and microwave for another 2-3 minutes or desired tenderness.
2. Combine margarine, water, seasoning and corn starch in a microwave safe bowl.
3. Heat on high for 1-2 minutes and stir until sauce thickens. Pour over hot vegetables and serve right away.

CONTAINS: **MILK, SOY**

Black Bean Quesadillas

P F i V

SERVES 8 Per serving: *CALORIES* 310 / *SODIUM* 670 mg **2 ½ CARB CHOICES**

Quesadillas are tortillas filled with cheese and other ingredients and heated until crisp and browned. This recipe includes black beans for protein, seasoned canned corn for added vegetables and sharp cheddar cheese for a great flavor. Whole wheat tortillas are made with whole grains. The recipe makes 8 servings, but leftovers can be wrapped individually and frozen for up to 2 months.

1-11 oz.can canned corn with peppers (baja blend), drained
1-15 oz. can black beans, reduced sodium, drained and rinsed
2 Tbsp. taco seasoning, reduced sodium
8-8 inch whole wheat tortillas
1 c. sharp cheddar cheese, finely shredded
Cooking spray

1. In a large bowl, mix taco seasoning with beans and corn. Mash beans slightly with a fork.
2. Preheat a large skillet or griddle to medium heat. Spray with cooking spray.
3. Place a tortilla on the cooking surface and spread evenly with 2 Tbsp. of cheese. Spoon 1/3 c. of filling over half of the tortilla. Fold over and cook on each side until browned and crispy.
4. Continue with the remaining tortillas and filling ingredients.
5. Cut quesadilla into wedges and serve with chopped vegetables, salsa or sour cream.

CONTAINS: **MILK, WHEAT, SOY**

Chicken Medallions in White Wine Sauce LS P

SERVES 4

Per serving: *CALORIES* 340 / *SODIUM* 80 mg

½ CARB CHOICE

A twist on Chicken Burre Blanc, this dish produces very tender chicken in a rich pan sauce. A dry white wine, like Chardonnay works well, but chicken broth can be substituted for the wine. For individuals with difficulty chewing and swallowing, the chicken can be pureed and covered in sauce to reduce choking.

1 lb. boneless, skinless, chicken breast
1 Tbsp. olive oil
¼ c. all purpose flour
1 tsp. onion powder

½ c. dry white wine (or chicken broth)
1 ½ c. chicken broth, low sodium
4 Tbsp. unsalted butter
salt and pepper, to taste

1. Trim fat from chicken breasts and cut into thin slices. Pound to even thickness.
2. Combine flour and onion powder in a medium bowl. Lightly coat the chicken and shake off excess flour.
3. In a large skillet, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add the chicken breast and saute until golden brown on each side. Do not fully cook the chicken.
4. Remove the chicken to a plate and keep warm.
5. Add the white wine (or chicken broth) to the pan and increase heat. Boil until the liquid has reduced by half, stirring up any browned bits.
6. Add the remaining chicken broth and chicken back to the pan. Reduce heat to medium and cook for 8-10 minutes until chicken is tender and fully cooked to a minimum temperature of 165°F.
7. Remove the chicken from the pan. Increase the heat and cook the sauce until reduced by half. Stir in the butter and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve sauce over the chicken medallions.

CONTAINS: **MILK**