Eating in late stage dementia

Good practice for quality dementia care. An A-Z of strategies, checklists and tools

Eating difficulties arise in late stage dementia. People who lack interest in food and have trouble swallowing are likely to lose body weight. Alternative means of ensuring nutritional balance may be needed.

- Continue to provide soft foods rather than puréed foods for as long as possible.
- Provide visually appealing meals and a diverse diet.
- Provide for all of a person's nutritional needs.
- Change the texture of food as needed as changes in ability take place.
- Check weight loss and think about use of fortified foods, supplements or foods higher in calories or protein.

People with severe and irreversible dementias may no longer be able to eat near the end of life and may need support and care to maintain their comfort.

- Do not force people to eat when they do not want to.
- Moisten their mouths and provide good oral care.
- Be aware of the possible side-effects of tube feeding: aspiration, infections and attempts by individuals to remove tubes.
- Abide by a person's end of life wishes regarding artificial nutrition and hydration. Artificial nutrition and hydration may be withheld, according to the person's wishes.

For related information, see the following checklists

- Advanced care planning
- Eating: checklist for positive experiences
- Eating, dining areas and kitchens
- Eating: dos and don'ts for assisted eating
- Palliative care