

Talking Point chat room 29 January
Eating and Drinking Q&A with Anila from the National Dementia Helpline

SerenaS	Hi everyone, we're going to start our Q&A shortly - our topic is Eating and Drinking and Anila from our Helpline is here to answer your questions. Hello Anila :)
AnilaA	Hi everyone :)
AnilaA	Yes, I'm happy to answer any questions you have on eating and drinking this afternoon.
SerenaS	Can you tell us a little about your role on the Helpline, Anila?
AnilaA	Yes absolutely, we're here to offer advice and information on aspects of dementia. We're also here to provide a listening ear to anyone who's been affected by dementia and offer emotional support.
SerenaS	Thanks. On the topic of Eating and Drinking, we see a lot of questions about what to do if a person with dementia has a poor appetite. Do you have any thoughts on this?
AnilaA	This is quite common, sometimes people develop poor appetite and lose interest in food and this can happen because of changes in food preferences, or the person may have difficulties chewing and swallowing. Coordination problems can also affect eating and drinking too.
AnilaA	To help stimulate appetite and interest in food you could try encouraging the person to get involved at mealtimes, often the smell of cooking can stimulate the senses and help remind a person that it's time to eat. Not only will this help keep the person interested in food and drink it will also help with maintaining skills and independence.
AnilaA	Changes in visual and spatial abilities can make it difficult for some people to distinguish food from the plate. It can help to use a coloured plate if the food is white for e.g. white fish may work better on a yellow plate rather than a white plate.
SerenaS	That's really helpful, thank you. :) For anyone who's just popped in, if you'd like to ask a question or contribute, please do.
Izzy	My husband has the opposite problem! He used to be a very light eater. Now he can eat for Scotland. He doesn't make any of his meals or help himself to anything so his portions are controlled. Having said that I am amazed at what he now puts away. He also eats far too quickly and will often try to put food in his mouth while he is still chewing the last mouthful. It's really hard to stop him from doing this. Any thoughts or ideas welcome!
Izzy	The silver lining is that he's forgotten he doesn't like vegetables and now scoffs them too! He nearly choked on a Brussels Sprout! I now cut these up!!
AnilaA	Hi Izzy, this can be quite common too! As you mentioned cutting up food into smaller chunks can help, you can also try and limit the amount that's being given. As many already know gentle reminders and prompts can help too.
Izzy	Thanks Anila. I do limit his portions so he's not over eating. It's the speed with which he eats that's scary!
SerenaS	Hope that helps, Izzy. Hope you're not snowed in, in Scotland!
AnilaA	Yes Izzy, I hope that helps too, you might find some useful tips in our Eating and Drinking factsheet too. http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/download_info.php?fileID=1799
Izzy	Thanks.
AnilaA	You're welcome :)

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Ladybird23	Good to see that we were not alone in the matter of eating
SerenaS	Hello Ladybird23 :) Is there anything you'd like to ask Anila, or anything you've found to be helpful?
AnilaA	Hi Ladybird, yes please do feel free to ask any questions.
Ladybird23	Unfortunately my Dad is at end of life care, and does not want to eat or drink, and the Doctor has said " He has turned his head to the wall, and it's just a matter of time now.
SerenaS	I am sorry to hear that, Ladybird.
AnilaA	Hi Ladybird, I'm sorry to hear about your dad, it sounds like a really difficult time for you. If you need to talk things through then please do come to us on the helpline.
Ladybird23	Thank you, we are getting the support from the doctor and care home. We can call them anytime which is good.
AnilaA	I'm glad to hear that, you can always ring us too, even if it's just to talk through how you're feeling.
Ladybird23	It is so hard, he was such an intelligent man and now this.
Izzy	I'm sorry to hear about your dad Ladybird.
Ladybird23	Thank you. My sister and I have a daily chat, and she sees him every Wednesday and I go every other weekend as we live 2 hours down the road. My bag is packed and car full of diesel.
SerenaS	I hope that the visit goes okay, Ladybird.
Ladybird23	Thank you.
Ladybird23	All what has been said on here is so true of this awful disease. There must be some common denominator somewhere for the researchers to grasp.
SerenaS	That's very true, Ladybird. I think discussing research is something that we could do during another chat room session as it's of interest to many members.
SerenaS	We're about halfway through our Q&A session on Eating and Drinking. Please do post a question or a comment if you'd like to.
dumpygirl	My husband used to love cheese and biscuits after a meal and always preferred it to a dessert. Since getting Alzheimer's he has developed a very sweet tooth and will always say yes to a pudding and eats chocolate as if it is going out of fashion. Also he will not eat a normal meal of meat and vegetables and always asks for either soup, a sandwich or something on toast. Is this normal. I worry he is not getting enough to eat but cannot force feed him.
Ladybird23	My Dad was the same. Loved the sweet stuff and put on a lot of weight, but he was eating and not choking so we let him.
AnilaA	Hi dumpygirl, yes this isn't unusual at all. Some people can experience changes in their eating habits including the type of food they prefer. Sometimes people develop a fondness for sweet foods and unusual flavour combinations. Changes in taste perception may mean people enjoy tastes they never liked before or dislike foods they always liked.
AnilaA	Fruit may be a healthier alternative to chocolates and cakes for balance? You could also try adding small amounts of sugar or honey to savoury foods or serve chutneys and sweet sauces with savoury dinners. Adding some sweet

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	ingredients to dishes, to encourage him to eat a range of foods can be helpful; for example, adding sweet apricots to a meat dish or adding honey to porridge or milky puddings.
AnilaA	Baking your own cakes and biscuits adding fruits and vegetables to them may also be well received. This might also be a good opportunity to get the person involved in baking and for some people can help evoke memories from their childhood.
AnilaA	There are some good recipe ideas to help encourage eating in our podcast on how to help maintain a nutritious diet and enjoyment of food when a person has dementia. http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/podcast_episode.php?episodeID=13 .
Lindy50	Hi Anila & co :) This reminds me of my uncle (now passed away) who the last year of his life ate absolutely everything smothered in tomato sauce. For him, it was no sauce, no eating! Not sure how healthy it was, but it was better than nothing....
Lindy50	Now that mum's appetite is so poor, I will look at that podcast
AnilaA	Hi Lindy50, I hope you get some good ideas from that :)
SerenaS	Thanks Anila, that's really helpful.
Ladybird23	We could not add to much sweetness to Dads meals as he is diabetic as well.
AnilaA	Hi Ladybird, yes it's important to get a good balance and for people who may need follow a special diet, advice from a dietician may need to be sought.
Ladybird23	This making me hungry and I have hours to go til tea time!
Ladybird23	My Dad is now being spoon fed, and porridge is his favourite at the moment.
SerenaS	We received this question from a Talking Point member - what equipment is there to help someone who can still feed themselves but is at the stage of using a spoon but not very adept at getting food onto the spoon?
AnilaA	Some people with dementia may struggle to handle cutlery or pick up a glass. They can also have difficulties getting food from the plate to their mouth.
AnilaA	Prompting and guiding (hand to mouth) can support someone if they have difficulties knowing what to do with the cutlery.
Ladybird23	We used to help Dad get his food on to the spoon, and he could manage to find his mouth.
AnilaA	Hi ladybird yes positive encouragement and gentle prompts given sensitively can often help.
AnilaA	If someone is experiencing difficulty with getting food onto the utensil specially adapted cutlery is available such as plate guards, lipped plates and deeper spoons. An occupational therapist can advise on any cutlery that might be helpful.
AnilaA	If the person is finding it too stressful than finger foods such as sandwiches, slices of fruit, quiche etc. may take the pressure of cutlery use.
Lindy50	I use finger foods a lot. They're also easier to serve in the small portions that mum likes, I find.
AnilaA	Hi Lindy50, yes finger foods work quite well for some people. Leaving a plate beside a person with finger food type snacks can be effective if the person has a poor appetite as you might find that they nibble at the food.

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AnilaA	There's also useful healthy eating guidance on NHS Choices too: www.nhs.uk/livewell/goodfood
dumpygirl	My friend's husband who has Alzheimer's has a very shaky hand and wondered if there was a cup which she could buy for him to use but which did not look like a disabled one.
AnilaA	Hi Dumpygirl, non-spill cups are available and it's helpful to get advice from an Occupational Therapist as they can advise on specially adapted cups which will be helpful for your friend's husband.
Ladybird23	My Dad had a baby cup. Or one of those camping cups with lids on and you drink out of the spout, like ones from the coffee shops or McDonalds.
Ladybird23	It's good to get all this advice and knowledge. Too late for me but hopefully to others
SerenaS	I'm going to bring our Q&A to a close, many thanks to Anila for giving her time and experience to us today.
AnilaA	You're welcome Serena, thank you all for having me here; it's been a pleasure :)
AnilaA	If anyone would like to get in touch with us on the helpline, feel free to do so, our helpline can be reached on 0300 222 1122.

Thanks for reading the transcript from our chat room session on 29 January.

Some helpful resources on this topic are listed below:

Alzheimer's Society factsheet on Eating and Drinking:

http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/download_info.php?fileID=1799

Alzheimer's Society podcast (a short talk that you can download) on how to help maintain a nutritious diet and enjoyment of food when a person has dementia:

http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/podcast_episode.php?episodeID=13

Healthy eating guidance on NHS Choices website: www.nhs.uk/livewell/goodfood

Alzheimer's Society National Dementia Helpline

Alzheimer's Society National Dementia Helpline - **0300 222 1122** - can provide emotional support, as well as guidance and signposting to other appropriate organisations.

The Helpline is usually open from 9am to 8pm Monday to Wednesday, 9am to 5pm Thursday to Friday and 10am to 4pm on Saturday and Sunday. You can email the helpline team at helpline@alzheimers.org.uk.

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If you have questions about our chat room, please contact us by emailing

talkingpoint@alzheimers.org.uk

You can view the chat room here: <http://forum.alzheimers.org.uk/chatroom.php>