



Nutrition for Older Adults: For Caregivers – Mental Decline and Nutrition

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Unintentional Weight Loss

Unintentional weight loss is a concern for older adults. Unintentional weight loss is often due to low food intake.

Mental Decline and Weight Loss

Mental decline is a leading cause of weight loss among older adults.

Memory loss, confusion, impaired judgment, difficult feeding behaviors, and decreased appetite are all linked with weight loss.

Tips if Mental Decline Affects Food Intake

- Be aware dehydration can make mental decline worse.
- Make meals a routine that occurs at the same time and in the same place to avoid confusion.
- Have the main meal at noon when appetite is larger and mental abilities

are at their peak to increase food intake.

- Avoid distractions at meals.
- Allow plenty of time for meals so they are not rushed.
- Serve familiar foods fixed in familiar ways.
- Offer fewer choices and small portions sizes with between meal snacks if needed.
- Serving one food item at a time may result in less confusion.
- Be aware that messiness or spills may happen due to loss of coordination.
- A person may not know what should or should not be eaten. The caregiver may have to make those decisions.
- Food temperatures may need to be checked because people may not be aware of burning.
- Some foods may need to be avoided or modify the texture if choking is a problem.
- If a person is not eating enough calories, talk with their doctor about supplemental nutrition.

Tips if Feeding Is Required By a Caregiver

- Preserve the dignity of the person who has to be fed.
- People being feed should be sitting upright to prevent choking.
- Feed small amounts of food at a time and not too fast. Feeding too fast can increase the risk of choking and food aspiration.
- Avoid straws that supply liquid more rapidly than it can be swallowed.
- Do not continue to feed a person if they appear to be choking or coughing.
- Foods should be nutrient dense because people may tire quickly and eat only small amounts of food.
- If a person clenches their teeth, spits out food, or has other difficult eating behaviors, stop mealtime for a few minutes. A short break can be helpful to both the person being feed and caregiver. Sometimes just having a different person feed can be helpful.
- A person may spit out food not because they are being difficult, but because they are having a hard time eating.

Sources

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