

# Supporting residents with dementia to eat during the coronavirus



As the world faces the unprecedented challenge presented by the Covid-19 virus pandemic, people living with dementia face the greatest threat, 700,000 of whom are likely to be self isolating. For residents in extra-care housing schemes and care homes, where dining halls have been forced to close, you may find that some residents may not be eating properly. This could be caused by the deviation from a normal routine, the lack of visual and social prompts to eat, not being around other people who are eating, forgetting that it is time to eat, or indeed how to use their cutlery. For whatever reason, many people with dementia need other people around to either copy or prompt them to eat their food.

## What can you do to help encourage residents with dementia to eat their food?

- **Stagger lunch times in the residents' rooms**, which may allow staff to sit with people as they eat, or at least start them eating then check in on them, possibly on rotation so that all residents are checked over the course of the lunch period.
- Where possible **encourage residents' families to videocall** the resident during mealtimes so that they can eat together.
- **Record which residents in particular aren't eating** and **look at them individually** to see what the reason is for this. It is unlikely that all residents are not eating for the same reason. No solutions will be 'one size fits all' but try and consider the obstacles for each individual.
- Where the above options aren't possible, **reopening the dining halls for key residents** may be the only way around this. Where possible, ensure residents are 2 metres apart so as to minimise the risk of coronavirus infections.

## Other resources to help you

- Our eating and drinking page on our website goes into more detail about prompting people to eat and the eating environment - [alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/daily-living/eating-drinking#content-start](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/daily-living/eating-drinking#content-start)
- The Caroline Walker Trust have produced a practical guide for eating and dementia - [www.cwt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/EW-Old-Dementia-Practical-Resource.pdf](https://www.cwt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/EW-Old-Dementia-Practical-Resource.pdf)
- The Northern Health and Social Care Trust in Northern Ireland have also produced a guide for carers - [www.northerntrust.hscni.net/pdf/Eating\\_well\\_with\\_dementia\\_leaflet.pdf](https://www.northerntrust.hscni.net/pdf/Eating_well_with_dementia_leaflet.pdf)
- Nutrition and Diet Resources also have a number of useful resources on eating and dementia - <https://www.ndr-uk.org/browse/c-Dementia-35/>
- Our online community Talking Point is also a good resource in terms of looking at the difficulties people with dementia and their carers experience around eating and drinking – [www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/talking-point-our-online-community](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/talking-point-our-online-community)
- Supporting people with dementia to eat – [www.journals.rcni.com/doi/pdfplus/10.7748/nop.2016.e811](https://www.journals.rcni.com/doi/pdfplus/10.7748/nop.2016.e811)
- A Look at Eating Behaviours and Dietary Changes in Patients With Dementia – [www.journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1533317516673155](https://www.journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1533317516673155)

While housing associations and care homes are having to work with reduced staff, ensuring individual approaches to care will be very challenging. However, this might be the only option to ensure all residents are eating and getting the nutrition and hydration they need, while ensuring they are adequately socially distancing. In all situations, you will have to consider the 'least worst' option – which may be residents too close to each other but eating their food, or residents staying in their rooms and minimising the risk of them getting coronavirus but then not eating enough. Remember everyone with dementia is different and different solutions will work for different people.