

Set up mealtimes to succeed, so they do not become a battlefield. They need to be structured around the person's individual needs. The sight of fruit nicely presented on a plate, the smell of freshly brewed coffee, or the taste of chocolate are examples of how food can stimulate the appetite. An activity that focuses on stimulating the senses may help the person to eat and enjoy food again, and you will need to experiment to find what works. The sharing of memories related to food may be a positive experience for some, while for others setting the table or watching the meal being prepared can be the trigger that works.

### **Loss of Appetite** - *may be caused by:*

- Forgetting how to chew or swallow.
- Dentures that don't fit properly.
- Not enough physical activity.
- Overstimulating environment

### **Comfort Considerations**

- Before a meal, ensure the person has been to the toilet.
- If the person is having a negative response to food on their plate, be mindful they may be thinking the food is not food and perceive it as something else.
- Talk the person through what is on their plate, in a calm way.
- If after talking through what is on the plate and they still cannot understand what it is, remove it from their plate and try something else.
- Temperature should be checked as the person may find it harder to judge this.
- Ensure sufficient lighting without glare or shadows which may increase confusion.
- Remove any unnecessary noises like a television or radio.

### **General Mealtime Success**

- Familiarity is a key factor in mealtime success.
- Ensure a calm atmosphere: you are '*being with*' the person, not '*doing for*' them.
- Concentrate on the feelings behind their words.
- Whenever possible, plan meals as a social occasion.
- Ensure food is clearly recognisable as food.
- Involve the person in choosing meals, and encourage them to be in the kitchen while it is being prepared and cooked, as smells may stimulate appetite.
- Keep the table free of condiments, ask if they would like sauce, etc, offering one at a time.
- Difficulty holding utensils can lead to loss of appetite and refusal to eat, so use adaptive cutlery, plates, and cups etc.
- Ensure table settings such as crockery and tablecloths are not patterned, but plain and a different colour from the food being served.
- If the use of cutlery seems confusing, consider serving finger food, if using a plate becomes challenging consider using a bowl.
- Eat together, so the person can copy you.

- Consider the persons previous appetite: have they always had a small appetite, a huge appetite or had a sweet tooth?
- Allow plenty of time for eating with no rushing.
- Plan for meals to be at regular times each day.
- Have finger foods available to snack throughout the day if appropriate.
- Offer snacks high in water content such as watermelon to help avoid dehydration.
- If meals take a while to finish, consider serving smaller portions and refill to keep hot food from going cold.
- Be mindful of eating most of one food before moving to next, as varying textures and flavours may increase confusion.
- Don't assume the person has finished because they have stopped eating.
- Ensure there are no medical reasons for appetite loss.
- Consult with medical professional if there is significant weight loss.
- Some eating problems may relate to the mouth, including gum disease or dentures.
- Visit a dietician or doctor for extra advice on maintaining good nutrition.
- Overeating may occur if they have forgotten they have recently eaten or becoming obsessed with a specific food.
- People living with dementia may lose their sense of taste and smell, affecting how they experience flavour.
- Even if food combinations seem unusual, be guided by what the person prefers to eat.
- If the person has been a heavy drinker, it may be difficult to change their habits so try offering low alcohol- or alcohol-free drinks. Ask visitors not to bring alcohol.

## **Make Mealtimes a Sociable Event**

- ✓ Watching sporting events on TV may be an opportunity to tempt people to eat strawberries and cream or potato chips.
- ✓ Fish and chip night – even eat the meal out of the paper! Reminiscence.
- ✓ Smells – such as freshly brewed coffee can evoke memories and can stimulate appetite and conversation. Start the conversation 'Wow, that coffee smells good' or 'The smell of those fried onions reminds me of the BBQ's we had'.
- ✓ After the meal, support the person to clear the dishes, wash up, dry pots and put away.
- ✓ Food is a great topic for conversation, some examples of conversation-starters could be:
  - Does coffee taste better from a china cup or a coffee mug?
  - What were your favourite lollies as a child?
  - Did you have a roast every Sunday for lunch?