

Healthy Eating

Eating healthy foods helps everyone stay well. It's even more important for people with Alzheimer's disease. Here are some tips for healthy eating.

Buying and Preparing Food

When the person with Alzheimer's disease lives with you:

- Buy healthy foods such as vegetables, fruits, and whole-grain products. Be sure to buy foods that the person likes and can eat.
- Give the person choices about what to eat—for example, “Would you like green beans or salad?”
- Buy food that is easy to prepare, such as premade salads and single food portions.

It may be helpful to have someone else make meals or use a service such as Meals on Wheels, which brings meals right to your home. For more information, check your local phone book or contact the Meals on Wheels organization: call 1-703-548-5558 or visit www.mowaa.org.

When a person with early-stage Alzheimer's disease lives alone, you can buy foods that the person doesn't need to cook. Call to remind him or her to eat.



Maintain Familiar Routines

Change can be difficult for a person with Alzheimer's disease. Maintaining familiar routines and serving favorite foods can make mealtimes easier. They can help the person know what to expect and feel more relaxed. If a home health aide or other professional provides care, family members should tell this caregiver about the person's preferences.

Try these tips:

- View mealtimes as opportunities for social interaction. A warm and happy tone of voice can set the mood.

- Be patient and give the person enough time to finish the meal.
- Respect personal, cultural, and religious food preferences, such as eating tortillas instead of bread or avoiding pork.
- If the person has always eaten meals at specific times, continue to serve meals at those times.
- Serve meals in a consistent, familiar place and way whenever possible.
- Avoid new routines, such as serving breakfast to a person who has never routinely eaten breakfast.

As Alzheimer's progresses, familiar routines and food choices may need to be adapted to meet the person's changing needs. For example, a family custom of serving appetizers before dinner can be preserved, but higher-calorie items might be offered to help maintain the person's weight.

Stay Safe

In the early stage of Alzheimer's, people's eating habits usually do not change. When changes do occur, living alone may not be safe anymore. Look for these signs to see if living alone is no longer safe for the person with Alzheimer's:

- The person forgets to eat.
- Food has burned because it was left on the stove.
- The oven isn't turned off.

Other difficulties, such as not sitting down long enough for meals and refusing to eat, can arise in the middle and late stages of the disease. These changes can lead to poor nourishment, dehydration, abnormally low blood pressure, and other problems.

Caregivers should monitor the person's weight and eating habits to make sure he or she is not eating too little or too much. Other things to look for include appetite changes, the person's level of physical activity, and problems with chewing or swallowing. Talk with the person's doctor about changes in eating habits.



For more caregiving tips and other resources:

- **Read** "Caring for a Person with Alzheimer's Disease": www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/caring-person-alzheimers-disease
- **Visit** www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/topics/caregiving
- **Call** the ADEAR Center toll-free: 1-800-438-4380

The Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center is a service of the National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health. The Center offers information and publications for families, caregivers, and professionals about Alzheimer's disease and age-related cognitive changes.

