

Helping Your Loved One Eat

To maintain good health, one needs to eat the right balance of foods from each of the four food groups (vegetable/fruit, meat/fish, cereal/potatoes) and drink plenty of fluids. Your body needs a combination of nutrients - proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, minerals, and fiber - to satisfy all of its requirements. If your loved one's food intake does not or cannot include everything he/she needs, check with his/her physician to see if food supplements might help.

Precautions

- When offering hot fluid through a straw, use caution so that your loved one does not burn his/her throat.
- Offer food slowly and in small amounts to prevent the person from choking.
- To avoid possible aspiration (choking), make sure your loved one is awake and alert before offering food or drink.
- Make sure the food is an acceptable part of his/her dietary plan before offering food.
- Test hot liquids before serving by dropping a few drops on your wrist.

Preparation

- Gather all supplies (towel, washcloth, special eating utensils, special drinking cups/straws)
- Prepare your loved one for meal time. Make sure he/she is dressed appropriately, take him/her to the restroom/use bed pan, wash his/her face and hands, make sure glasses and dentures are in place.
- Wash your hands and make sure the dining area/tray is clean.
- If your loved one cannot or chooses not to be moved from the bed:
 - Change any soiled bed linens
 - Sit your loved one up with a tray-table across the bed
 - Support back/neck with pillows as necessary
 - Place a clothing protector under the chin to protect against spills
 - Place fresh drinking water within reach

Procedure

1. Place food within his/her reach.
2. Open any containers or packages. Butter bread and cut up food if your loved one needs help. If not restricted by diet, add additional seasonings as requested.

3. Describe what is on the tray if your loved one cannot see and ask what order he/she prefers to eat things.
4. Encourage your loved one to hold any finger foods.
5. To offer liquids to a person who cannot sit upright, raise and support the head with one hand while holding the cup with the other and allow him/her to drink.
6. To offer liquids by straw, stir the liquid with the straw to distribute heat evenly. Place the straw in your loved one's mouth so that he/she can suck and swallow as desired. (If he/she sucks too much liquid, you may need to pinch off the straw and pull it away to allow swallowing.)
7. Try to avoid having your loved one finish too much liquid first so that he/she is not too full to eat the solids.
8. Feed slowly, naming each food as you offer it.
9. Fill a spoon only 2/3 full. Touch the spoon to your loved one's lower lip and then to his/her tongue to let him know where the food is and when to open his mouth.
10. Allow time between bites for chewing and swallowing.
11. Offer a liquid and then a few bites of food, followed by a liquid again.
12. Wipe your loved one's mouth with a napkin or towel as needed.
13. Move the food away when he/she is finished eating.
14. Provide mouth care after the meal.