Alzheimer's Caregiving Tips

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 rotisserie chicken, frozen vegetables and foods packed in single portions.
- It may be helpful to use a grocery shopping service, have someone else make meals, or use a home delivered meal service. (see next page)

When a person with early-stage Alzheimer's disease lives alone:

- Utilize a grocery shopping service from a local grocer.
- Use a use a home delivered meal service
- 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 avoiding pork.

Adapted from The Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center. A service of the National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health. For more information visit the website www.nia.gov/alzheimers/topics/caregiving or call the ADEAR line at 1800-438-4380

- 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 manner 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.

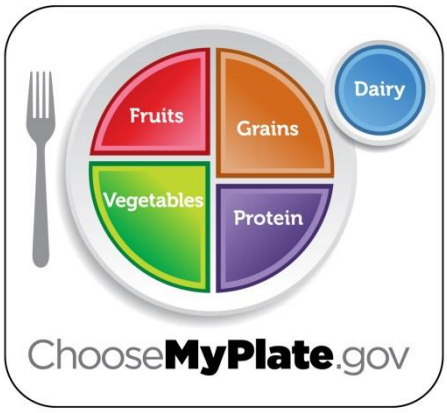
Stay Safe

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 or stove is not 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.



South Carolina Aging and Disability Resource Centers provide home-delivered meal services across the state.

Appalachia (803) 242-9733 serves Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Oconee, Pickens, & Spartanburg counties

Upper Savannah (1-800) 922-7729 serves Abbeville, Edgefield, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick, & Saluda counties

Catawba (1-800) 622-8330 serves Chester Lancaster, York, & Union counties

Central Midlands (803) 376-5390 serves Fairfield, Lexington, Newberry, & Richland counties

Lower Savannah (1-866) 845-1550 serves Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Calhoun, & Orangeburg counties

Santee Lynches (1-800) 948-1042 serves Clarendon, Kershaw, Lee, & Sumter counties

Pee Dee (843) 383-8632 serves Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Marion, & Marlboro counties

Waccamaw (1-888) 302-7550 serves Georgetown, Horry, & Williamsburg counties

Trident (1-800) 894-0415 serves Berkeley, Charleston, & Dorchester counties

Lowcountry (1-877) 846-8148 serves Beaufort, Colleton, Hampton, & Jasper counties