Eating Environment

The dining atmosphere is an important part of your overall mealtime experience. Eating is a social event, and the atmosphere you eat in affects how you feel about the food and the people you are dining with.

People with memory problems may face certain challenges at the dining table, such as becoming distracted by noise or other objects, being confused by different plates or utensils, or feeling uncomfortable in the space itself. Some people can be over-stimulated by the environment while others need cues to eat.

To help make your mealtimes together as enjoyable as possible, try these simple tips:

- **Set the table nicely**, with placemats and napkins. Use different colors.
- Several objects on the table may be distracting for some. Use your own
- judgment as to the best approach.
- **Make sure the table is the right height** for eating and allows enough leg room.
- **Minimize the music or background noise** during the meal. For some, soft 'classics' music can be soothing.
- **Decorate the room simply**, and avoid busyness in wall decorations.
- **Keep the area well-lit** with overhead lighting, so people can see their food.
- **Use a chair with good back support.**
- **Choose cutlery that is easy to hold** and give large napkins for wiping up food.
- **Place food portions on each dining plate** to avoid the distraction of serving bowls.
- **Use pleasant aromas**, such as mint or vanilla, to make the area warm and cozy.
- **Turn the television off.**
- **Have the meal ready and on the table** before calling dining mates to dinner.

Elegant dining may not always be realistic or possible for people with memory problems. Eating together, however, should still remain an important part of your daily lives. Making some small changes to the eating environment can help keep the person with memory problems active and engaged in the mealtime experience, and maintain their independence and dignity. Some changes may work for awhile, then will lose their effectiveness. Watch for signs that further change is needed.