

Eating Together

Enjoying the social side of eating

Meals are a great time to get together with others for a good visit. Here are some ways to do that:

- Invite friends or family to your home. Sometimes it becomes hard to put on a meal for others, but these are some things you can do to make it easier:
- Simplify the menu. For example, serve foods that can be made ahead of time or foods that don't have to be cooked.
- Plan for others to bring along certain parts of the meal.
- Order take-out or use pre-cooked items.
- Rather than having a meal, invite guests for appetizers or coffee and dessert.
- Enjoy attending meals held by church groups or other organizations.
- Go to a restaurant together. Familiar places are usually preferred.
- Let others host the meal at their home. If you want, ask if you can bring something for the meal.
- If living in a retirement home or nursing home, invite friends or family to stay for a meal. Request a private table or arrange to eat in a special dining area for guests if available.

Sometimes people with memory problems need a little extra help to participate in conversations at the table. These are some ways you can assist them:

- Eat in a quiet, peaceful setting where it is easy to hear the conversation and not be distracted. Small groups or one-on-one situations are often best.
- Start the conversation or ask questions. See the box below for topic suggestions.
- Be patient and give time to find the right words. Gently suggest words they might be looking for.
- Gently redirect conversation if it is repetitive.
- Often people with memory problems just love to listen. You can help them follow the conversation by:
 - Watching for understanding
 - Slowing down the conversation
 - Restating or rephrasing what was just said
 - Providing background details when a story is being told
- Before getting together with others, rehearse their names and review things that might come up in conversation with them.
- Share with others about having memory problems

Sometimes it's not easy to carry on a conversation at meals. Here are a few ideas to help:

1. Sit near a window during meals and enjoy nature – watch and talk about the birds or other things you see.
2. Listen to music together as you eat.
3. Listen to the news while eating and talk about things happening around the world or in your community.
4. Ask friends and family to write down memories of times you have spent together in the past. Put them in a book or place them in a bowl on the table. Read and talk about one of the memories as you eat together.
5. Bring letters or print outs of emails from friends or family to the table and read them together during meals.
6. Watch pets play and talk about what they are doing as you eat.
7. Be mindful that people with memory problems may need to focus on one thing at a time. If necessary, let them concentrate on eating first and talk more together after the meal.