



Help with Eating

By: [CVH Team](#)

A person living with an advancing illness will not eat as much as they once did. While it is important not to become too focused on increasing the amount of food a person eats, there are a number of strategies that can be used to increase interest in eating.

One of the simplest tactics is to offer small snacks throughout the day, and to make these snacks high in protein and calories. Cream soups and ice cream are good choices. If the person doesn't want to eat meat, then look for high protein alternatives such as eggs and fish.

Recognize that people with serious illnesses often become full quickly, sometimes after just a few bites of food. Do not push people to eat more, as nausea and vomiting may result. Despite your concern, focus on making mealtime a social occasion, and avoid making mealtimes a battle ground about eating. Relying on favourite foods can be a good way to ensure the person will be more likely to eat. If the person is being cared for in a hospital or other facility away from the home, ask the medical team about bringing in foods that are not available in that setting. Above all, remember that rejection of food is not a rejection of you.

Here are practical tips to help someone at meal-time:

- Ensure the person is sitting comfortably and upright to make swallowing comfortable.
- Provide finger foods when eating with cutlery has become difficult.
- Use a spoon whenever practical as opposed to a fork.
- Offer small amounts of food, placed at the front of the mouth, allowing the person time to swallow before offering another bite.

See also: [Lack of Appetite and Loss of Weight](#)

For more information about providing hands-on care, see [Module 6](#) of the Caregiver Series.

For additional resources and tools to support you in your caregiving role visit [CaregiversCAN](#).

Content reviewed January 2023