



“I don't enjoy food like I used to”

The views of people with dementia about mealtimes

Joan Murphy and James McKillop

Background:

Mealtimes fulfil 2 fundamental human needs

- nourishment
- interpersonal involvement

Aim:

To gather information from the first-hand experience of 13 people with dementia about their mealtimes

Findings from focus groups

Mealtimes



For several people, their experience of mealtimes had changed since their diagnosis of dementia. Several said that they now skip breakfast and sometimes lunch

- *Just went off it [breakfast]*
- *Sometimes I'll take it [breakfast] sometimes I don't – I try to have it*
- *I can take it or leave it*



Changes in taste



Almost all the participants talked about how their taste had changed both for food and drink.

- *Tastes have changed – I used to eat potatoes and mince for breakfast, dinner and tea [laughs]but its not the same*
- *I can't describe exactly what it is, but it's the tongue. I can't clean it, I can't get rid of it*
- *It's just a bland taste*

Some families had overcome the problem of lack of taste by going for more strongly flavoured food.

Where to eat



Some found it more difficult to eat out since their diagnosis for various reasons including noise, distractions and unfamiliarity.

- *I don't like eating out now. It's too noisy for me*
- *Too much distractions, televisions, too many people talking*
- *I have difficulty with strange knives, forks and spoons – makes me slower and food gets cold and less tasty*

Remembering to eat & drink



Another key factor reported by most was the problem of forgetting to eat and drink

- *I don't drink enough – I keep forgetting*
- *I'm forever getting rows for not eating enough*
- *My husband leaves food out for me to make sure I eat it.*

Appetite



- *I rarely feel hungry. Looking at the mat I can tell my eating and drinking isn't good*
- *Sometimes I don't eat for 3 days - It doesn't bother me – I just don't feel hungry*
- *I just tend to consume the food rather than enjoy it.*

Things that might help



- reducing distractions like TV and noise when eating
- avoiding difficult food
- having more time
- getting involved in cooking with a partner
- adding additional flavour to food
- having food which looks attractive
- having smaller meals
- having medication in liquid form rather than as tablets
- being reminded by others to eat and drink
- going to familiar cafes or restaurants when eating out
- having own cutlery when eating out

