

**If you can, why not get involved in preparing your food.** You may be able to help in peeling vegetables, or buttering bread or pancakes. Speak to your carer about getting more involved in your own food preparation.

**We start to eat long before we put food in our mouths.** Cooking food, the smell, thinking about what it will taste like and the sight of a plate of tasty food can all make us feel hungry.

**Your carer needs to know what you want to eat so that they can ensure that you eat well and stay healthy. Talk to them about your preferences and about changes in what you want to eat. Do not feel that you are troubling them.**

*“You eat with your eyes”.*

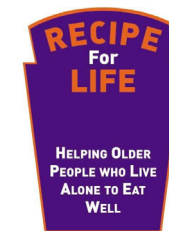
*“Well fruit. I used to buy apples, but they were starting to go off before I got them eaten. I get grapes now, always picking on a grape, every time I pass in the kitchen. I have them every day, but I just pick and choose when I like, no set time for that.”*

*“Just having someone to sit down with you when you’re eating, and have a little chat, that makes a difference.”*

Quotes from Older People, involved with the Recipe for Life Project, Royal Bank of Scotland Centre for the Older Person’s Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh, 2005.



# Nutrition in Later Life



**Eating well is vital for overall good health.**

Often older people find it is difficult to eat well.

This can be due to:

- Loss of appetite/interest in food
- Things don’t taste the same
- Eating alone
- Medication affecting appetite and taste
- Boring menus

If you don’t eat well, you are more at risk of:

- Illness due to poor immune system  
e.g., catching colds, flu, stomach bugs
- Falls and injuries
- Malnutrition (under nutrition)

This leaflet explains some of the changes in taste and appetite you might experience and how we might work together to ensure you are eating well.

Do you eat less than you used to?

Do you find that meat doesn't taste the same?

Are bread or potatoes getting more difficult to chew or swallow?

If you answered yes to these questions, don't worry – you are not unusual. **Changes in taste occur naturally as we get older. Illness or medication may also make us feel that we don't want to eat.**

If something no longer tastes good we may eat less, or cut it out altogether. However, this can mean that we do not get enough nourishment to keep feeling well and staying healthy.

**If you find that this happens to you, have a chat with your carer and the people that help to prepare food for you.**

Think about some of the following alternatives.

- If you can't eat meat, try scrambled eggs, omelettes, tuna, tinned salmon, cheese, beans on toast or vegetarian dishes. Try to have milk and milky puddings (e.g. custard, rice pudding) every day.
- If bread and potatoes become difficult to eat, why not try toast, crackers or even wholemeal bread or pancakes. Mashed potatoes may be easier to eat. If you haven't tried pasta, maybe you should give it a go - macaroni cheese or spaghetti bolognese are tasty choices.
- Unless you have a medical condition with which you are advised not to eat fatty foods, don't be afraid to eat some foods such as cheese, butter, cakes and pastries.

- Make sure you eat fibre – found in fruit, vegetables and some cereals. This can help to keep your bowel working well and prevent constipation.

**It is also vital that you drink plenty of fluids!** Many people think that if they are on tablets to reduce water retention, that they should drink less. **This is not true!** Drinking water can actually help to raise energy levels, and may also help prevent constipation and urinary tract infections.

**Don't be afraid to ask for smaller meals.**

If you have a small appetite, a large meal can really put you off. Speak with your carer about having smaller meals and snacks when you want them instead of a couple of larger meals.

**Sometimes a long gap between meals can make you feel as if you are not hungry** – and when you do eat you seem to fill up really quickly. This happens because your stomach overreacts to the food and produces too much acid too quickly.

- Try not to leave large gaps between eating.
- If you haven't eaten for a while, but still don't feel hungry, try a glass of milk or carton of yogurt. It can stimulate your appetite and make you feel like something more substantial.
- Try not to go to bed hungry. Have a slice of toast or pot of custard, or maybe a milky drink like Ovaltine or hot chocolate about half an hour before bed. This can keep your body fuelled up during the long period between your tea and breakfast.