



Finger Food Ideas

For people living with later-stage dementia

Helping maintain independence, nutrition & enjoyable mealtimes

♥ **Nicole** dementiaonline.org

Practical guides for families and carers

Why finger foods can help

As dementia progresses, mealtimes often become more challenging. Some people lose the ability to use a knife and fork, while others become distracted during meals or prefer to walk around rather than sit at a table. Offering nutritious finger foods can make eating easier and less stressful.

The aim isn't to prepare elaborate meals — it's to provide foods that are easy to hold, enjoyable to eat and nourishing.

Important: *If the person has difficulty swallowing, coughs during meals, or has been diagnosed with dysphagia, finger foods may not be appropriate. A speech pathologist or healthcare professional should assess swallowing and recommend suitable food textures.*

Finger foods may:

- Encourage independent eating.
- Reduce frustration with cutlery.
- Make meals less overwhelming.
- Allow smaller meals throughout the day.
- Increase overall food intake.
- Reduce stress for carers.

Breakfast ideas

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| ■ Toast fingers with butter or avocado | ■ Banana halves |
| ■ Cheese on toast cut into strips | ■ Apple slices (peeled if needed) |
| ■ Mini pancakes | ■ Pear slices |
| ■ Pikelets | ■ Soft fruit pieces |
| ■ Hard-boiled egg halves | ■ Mini muffins — savoury or fruit |
| ■ French toast fingers | ■ Breakfast bars (soft varieties) |

Lunch ideas

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| ■ Sandwich fingers | ■ Tuna patties |
| ■ Mini wraps | ■ Mini quiches |
| ■ Cheese cubes (watch choking risk) | ■ Savoury muffins |
| ■ Ham slices rolled with cheese | ■ Small sausage rolls |
| ■ Chicken strips | ■ Soft meatballs |
| ■ Turkey slices | ■ Pasta bake squares |
| ■ Zucchini slice | ■ Frittata |

Dinner ideas

■ Mini meatballs	■ Roast potato wedges
■ Fish fingers	■ Sweet potato wedges
■ Chicken goujons	■ Roast beetroot wedges
■ Homemade chicken nuggets	■ Steamed vegetable sticks
■ Mini hamburgers	■ Zucchini or pumpkin fritters
■ Mini meatloaf slices	■ Vegetable slice squares

Healthy snack ideas

■ Cheese cubes	■ Soft pear slices
■ Yoghurt pouch (if appropriate)	■ Watermelon cubes
■ Fruit pieces	■ Rice cakes
■ Banana	■ Crackers
■ Strawberries	■ Peanut butter on toast fingers (if safe)
■ Seedless grapes, cut appropriately	■ Rice pudding
■ Custard	■ Jelly
■ Smoothies	

Sweet treats

■ Mini scones	■ Fruit loaf fingers
■ Banana bread	■ Pikelets
■ Mini fruit muffins	■ Rice pudding
■ Custard	■ Homemade oat slice
■ Soft biscuits	■ Frozen fruit in small pieces

If someone is eating very little, a favourite dessert may provide valuable energy and enjoyment.

Foods that add extra nutrition

If your loved one has a poor appetite, try including:

- Cheese
- Eggs
- Greek yoghurt
- Avocado
- Nut butters (if safe and appropriate)
- Full-cream dairy products
- Beans or lentils in suitable dishes
- Lean meats
- Oily fish, if enjoyed

Small portions with extra protein and healthy fats can be more useful than large meals that go uneaten.

Making finger foods easier to eat

- ✓ Cut food into manageable pieces.
- ✓ Avoid foods that crumble excessively.
- ✓ Offer one or two choices at a time.
- ✓ Use plain coloured plates that contrast with the food.
- ✓ Keep the table uncluttered.
- ✓ Allow plenty of time.
- ✓ Sit together and eat if possible.
- ✓ Offer drinks regularly during and between meals.

If your loved one walks while eating

Some people with advanced dementia prefer to move around rather than remain seated. If it is safe to do so, finger foods may allow them to continue eating while walking. Always supervise where appropriate to reduce the risk of choking, and to avoid slip risks on any dropped food.

Watch for signs that eating has become more difficult

Speak with a healthcare professional if your loved one:

- Frequently coughs while eating or drinking.
- Holds food in their mouth.
- Has difficulty swallowing.
- Loses significant weight.
- Refuses most foods.
- Develops repeated chest infections.

These may be signs that a swallowing assessment is needed.

Final thoughts

Finger foods are not about lowering expectations — they're about adapting meals to meet changing abilities. A sandwich cut into small strips, a piece of banana, a homemade mini quiche or a handful of cheese cubes can sometimes be more successful than a large plated meal.

The goal is to help your loved one continue enjoying food, maintain good nutrition and preserve as much independence as possible.

Remember — every bite counts, every drink matters, and every shared mealtime is an opportunity for comfort, connection and care.