

# How to help an adult with eating and drinking

## Asking for professional medical advice

- Trouble chewing, or food left in the mouth or throat after swallowing.
- Coughing or clearing the throat frequently when eating or drinking.
- Hearing a “wet” sound in the voice after eating or drinking.

## Creating a calm, pleasant environment

- Turn off the TV and turn on relaxing music.
- Use good lighting.
- Contrast the color between the food, dishes, place settings, and table.

## Preparing the food and drink

- Follow instructions from medical providers.
- In general, moist and tender foods are easier to eat.
- Dry, tough, sticky, or crunchy foods are harder to chew and swallow.
- Consider cutting food no wider than the width of a fork.
- If large portions are overwhelming, hold part back until they're ready for it.

## Readying the person you are helping

- Assist to toilet and wash hands.
- Make sure they're wearing any glasses, hearing aids, and properly-fitting dentures.
- Engage the person in conversation using a calm tone.
- Help them to sit as upright as possible.
- Be sure they're alert and paying attention before presenting food or drink.

## Providing verbal or visual cues

- Remind them to take a bite or sip.
- Instruct them to pick up their food, utensil, or cup.
- Hand them their food item, utensil, or cup.
- Model the desired action for them to imitate.

## Assisting an adult with eating and drinking

- Sit face-to-face.
- Smaller bites and sips are safer than larger bites of food or gulps of liquid.
- A slower pace is safer than a faster pace.
- Use a clear glass so you can judge how much fluid is entering the mouth.
- Avoid dumping food or liquid into their mouth.
- Gently touching the lower lip or tip of tongue with the food or utensil may cue them to close their mouth to take the offered food.
- Alternate between food items to add variety and increase interest.
- Switch between food and beverage, which may help decrease residue in mouth or throat.
- Look inside their mouth to make sure it's clear before offering anything else.

## Engaging the person you're helping

- Narrate what you're doing as you present different food and drink items.
- Our brains kick off the eating or drinking pattern as we bring our hand to our mouth. Try to engage the person you're helping with moving their hand to their mouth to tap into this brain process.
  - **Hand-over-hand** assistance. You place the food item, utensil, or cup in their hand and guide their hand to their mouth.
  - **Hand-under-hand** assistance. With this technique, you hold the item and place their hand on top of yours.

## The importance of oral care

- Routine oral care reduces bacteria in the mouth, which could cause aspiration pneumonia if it is carried into the lungs.
- Whether or not a person has teeth, they should use a toothbrush and toothpaste in their mouth at least every morning and night. (Unless otherwise advised by a medical professional.)
- The friction of the toothbrush removes bacteria from teeth, gums, tongue, and roof of mouth.