

## ASK Silver Doc:

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*Board Certified in Geriatric Medicine*



Dear Silver Doc,

My mother has suffered from Alzheimer's disease for many years. In the last several months, she seems to have lost interest in eating and has already lost about 5 pounds. She had always been a good eater, but now she leaves the table after just a few nibbles of bread and juice, and only wants to eat sweets, like ice cream and cookies. Any idea what might be going on and what we can do?

Mary

Dear Mary,

It is not uncommon for persons in later stages of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias to reach a point when they lose interest in food, just as they lose interest in many other activities and interests. Once you have confirmed with her doctor that nothing else is going on to explain the change, the challenge becomes finding creative ways to maintain nutrition. Remember, the victim of moderate-severe Alzheimer's disease suffers not only from disease-related memory loss, but also from impaired judgment, limited language comprehension, short attention span, poor impulse control, and loss of ability to use tools and utensils. With such deficits, consider how overwhelming is a typical family meal setting and how unappealing a full plate of food of a variety of different textures and colors. So what are the options? Finger foods are commonly helpful, especially when silverware use is becoming difficult, as are frequent offerings of appealing snacks. Assure adequate fluid intake with frequent offerings and persistence. Consider known food preferences and possible chewing, swallowing or choking sensitivities. Use non-overwhelming portions of bite-sized pieces of fruit, vegetables, cheese, meat, bread or crackers with peanut butter, cream cheese, jam, etc. Now is generally not the time to be worrying about strict control of cholesterol or other dietary restrictions. Use supplements as tolerated, in liquid, pudding, or snack bar form. If there is no sensitivity to milk or milk products, powdered "instant breakfasts" may be a more acceptable and less expensive alternative to canned supplements, and either can be "doctored" with ice cream, raw eggs, chocolate flavorings, etc. Talk to other family members and share ideas. When in doubt, and please do not be insulted by the analogy, think about how one gets adequate nourishment into a picky eating toddler. You are doing well by your mother to be thinking about these changes and how to manage them now and not waiting until large amounts of weight and reserve have been lost. Thank you, Mary, for your very important question.

Silver Doc

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*“Silver Doc” is Dr. Michele Haber, a Board Certified Internal Medicine and Geriatric Medicine specialist. Dr. Haber specializes in evaluations in the home or facility focusing on Alzheimers’ disease and other dementias, early memory changes, behavioral problems, functional decline and frailty, polypharmacy and other geriatric medical issues. Send questions for “Silver Doc” to: [mahaber@att.net](mailto:mahaber@att.net)*