# Difficulty with Eating

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<tr>
<th>Identify the Problem</th>
<th><strong>PROBLEM:</strong> Difficulty with Eating (including chewing, swallowing, dental concerns)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>GOAL/EXPECTED OUTCOME:</strong></td>
<td>To reduce difficulty with eating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educate Yourself</td>
<td><strong>ASSESS FURTHER:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Understand the possible triggers of the problem:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Is the person having a side effect of a medication that affects hunger?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Is the person experiencing any pain or illness? Is the person constipated?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Does the person have any mouth discomfort, such as painful gums, dentures not fitting right, etc.?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Is the person really tired at meal time?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Is the person’s mouth dry?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Are there too many steps associated with eating?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Does the person have difficulty with chewing?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Does the person have trouble seeing his/her food? (The food might be the same color as the plate and blend in)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Is the person eating in a place he/she does not recognize?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Are there too many distractions or too much noise around the person?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Does the person not remember to stop and eat?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Understand the possible meaning of the problem to the person with Alzheimer’s:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Is the person embarrassed to be fed by someone else?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Is the person frustrated or overwhelmed?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Understand the possible meaning of the problem to the caregiver:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Is the caregiver frustrated?</td>
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<td>• Is the caregiver worried?</td>
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<td>Adapt Problem solve with interventions and actions</td>
<td><strong>TEACH PROBLEM-SOLVING STRATEGIES TO CAREGIVER:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Make mealtimes simple, relaxed, and calm</td>
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<td>• Make sure the person is comfortable</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Allow ample time for eating</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Make sure the person’s lips are not dry; use ChapStick as needed</td>
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<td>• If the person wears dentures, make sure they are properly in place</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Preparing the eating area</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Make sure the plate is a different color from the food</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Try to avoid patterns on placemats, plates and tablecloths. They can be distracting</td>
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<td>o Increase lighting in eating area</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Reduce the noise and distractions around the person</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Make eating simple. Try these options:</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Serve only one food at a time</td>
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<td>o Use bowls instead of plates</td>
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Standardized Care Plans have been adapted from the Alzheimer's Disease Coordinated Care for San Diego Seniors (ACCESS) Project
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<th><strong>CLINICAL SUPPORT:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>• Have a good dental check-up of the person’s gums, teeth and dentures</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Check with a doctor to see if problems with eating are a side effect of a medication or health problem</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Have vision or glasses checked</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Refer to PCP to evaluate for appropriate dietary needs. Request referral for swallowing evaluation (particularly important in later stages)</td>
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<th><strong>CAREGIVER SUPPORT AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>• Listen empathically to caregiver and evaluate for level of distress</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Refer to IHSS</td>
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<td>• Refer to MSSP</td>
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<td>• Refer to Meals on Wheels</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Refer to Alzheimer’s Greater Los Angeles for support groups, disease education, and care consultation</td>
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<tr>
<td>o ALZ Direct Connect referral</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Provide 24/7 Helpline #: 844.HELP.ALZ</td>
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<td>o Website: <a href="http://www.alzgla.org">www.alzgla.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Send literature:</td>
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<td>o Topic Sheet – “Difficulty with Eating”</td>
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**FOLLOW UP:**
- Schedule a phone call with caregiver to discuss outcomes and provide additional support

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<th>NOTES:</th>
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