

Dining with Dementia: Creating Joy around the Table

BY DOROTHY COLBY
(HAWAII)

As a Positive Approach to Care™ dementia educator, the administrator at Hale Kū'ike dementia care facility in Honolulu, and a member of a family that has seen many go through the journey of dementia, I know that when dementia sits down at the table, everything changes.

I started my professional life in dementia care as a personal chef for families with seniors at home, and then moved on to become the head chef for Hale Kū'ike. For a person living with dementia, dining can be one of the great moments of joy in their day. Food can spark memories, provide comfort, and bring pleasure to the table. This is especially important for people living with



dementia, people who truly live in the moment.

To help bring these moments of joy to the table, we need to start with an understanding of the changes that dementia brings, and then adjust our approach and the dining environment to meet the person's changing needs.

It is helpful to understand that the diseases that cause dementia, such as Alzheimer's and Lewy Body Diseases, cause progressive brain failure. This not only affects memory, but all cognition and bodily functions. The progression of dementia brings many changes, impairing taste and smell, peripheral vision and depth perception, chewing and swallowing abilities, and fine motor skills. These changes, combined with the hallmark impairments to memory, can make the dining experience a serious challenge, in addition to the struggle to provide basic nutrition.

A person living with dementia may not remember to eat, leading to weight loss. They may not

remember that they just ate, and demand more food, leading to overeating and weight gain. They may not be able to manage multiple utensils, or have the skill to use them as they once did. Here are some tips to help make the dining environment more friendly, familiar, functional, and forgiving.

- Try to keep the environment quiet and calm.
- Too many dishes, cups, and utensils at once can be distracting and frustrating.
- Pattern-free, brightly colored dishes help contrast food from the plate and make it more visible.
- Offer choices, but keep them simple. For example, you can offer two drinks but only have one on the table at a time.
- Serve meals in courses on smaller plates so portions are not overwhelming.
- If you know food needs to be cut into bite-size pieces because the skill to do it has been lost, do plate preparation ahead of time and serve it ready-to-eat so the person living with dementia won't feel like a child.
- If the person needs assistance


eating, sit down at their eye-level on their dominant side to offer any cueing or physical help.

Even as swallowing issues become more serious and food needs to be pureed, food can still be a source of joy. Minnesota Dame **Barb Strand's** cookbook "*Smooth and Tasty: Easy to Swallow Foods*," gives great information on how to create delicious, high-calorie, nutrient-dense, and easy-to-swallow foods.


We need to understand that people living with dementia are doing the very best they can every day, and they cannot change what is happening to them. But if we can change our approach, as well as the dining environment, they can regain dignity and pleasure at the table. They may not remember the meal later, but the joy and the positive feelings they take away from it will last beyond the memory.

To learn more about the Positive Approach to Care™ for people living with dementia please visit dorothycolby.com and teepasnow.com.

Hawaii Dame Dorothy Colby. Dame Barb Strand's cookbook for preparing easy-to-swallow foods.



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It was also utilitarian; vegetables were grown with the flowers. Washington added a handsome green house for tropical plants and citrus.

The Botanical Garden is located behind the spinning house. Washington called it "the little garden," and experimented with new crops here. The Fruit Garden (and Nursery), near the Lower Garden, has apple, pear, cherry, and apricot trees. The fruit was used for jam, cider, and brandy.

Washington abandoned tobacco cultivation to build a stone, merchant gristmill and indoor waterwheel in 1770-1771. During our visit, master miller Steve Bayshore explained the Oliver Evans' automated milling system Washington added in 1791 (U.S. Patent Number three). This was cutting-edge technology in the late 18th century!

Spirits were commonplace in the lives of most colonial citizens. Our next stop was Washington's recon-

structed rye whiskey distillery. The original, built in 1797-1798, was highly profitable and one of the largest in the country.

We tasted samples of aged and also filtered, unaged whiskey made by Washington's traditional 18th century methods.

During the day, we assembled at the Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center to see a powerful, new exhibit: *Lives Bound Together: Slavery at George Washington's Mount Vernon*.

After a thought-provoking and edifying day, we appreciated the lovely Virginia box lunches prepared by D.C. Dame **Karen Lippold**, using recipes from *The Best of Virginia Farms Cookbook and Tourbook* by CiCi Williamson.

We dined on Loudoun County Beef Salad, Green Pea Salad, and Sally Lunn bread. Sweets epitomized hospitality in colonial days. Our desserts satisfied and soothed: Aunt Silence's Jumbals, Kenmore Gingerbread, and Syllabus, a drinkable, alcoholic pudding.