

# Scenario: Mealtimes - Plates

Visual function is often reduced in people with dementia conditions. This can impact meal times and the ability to see food on a plate. Changes in visual perception can make it difficult to differentiate between the colour and shape of the food, plate, and table. For example, white fish/ plain chicken on a white plate may be difficult to see due to poor contrast between the food and the plate. Similarly, patterned crockery can cause confusion as the pattern may be perceived as food. As a result, changes to visual function may reduce a person's food intake.

## Aims



The aim of this training scenario is to simulate reduced visual function experienced by people with dementia and how this can impact the daily activity of eating meals.

## Learning Objectives



- Increase awareness of the visual and perceptual challenges experienced by people with dementia
- Recognise the effect of the dining environment on people with dementia
- Develop dementia-friendly dining environments
- Increase empathy towards people with dementia

## When to use this scenario



This scenario can be used in introductory dementia care training courses to understand the impact of visual impairments and demonstrate how best to support people with dementia during meal times. This scenario is not suitable for online training; however, the glasses can be layered and placed over the lens of a camera to take images of different plates to demonstrate the effect of reduced vision in online settings (see plate handout for examples).

## Equipment



- Multiple pairs of blurred vision simulation glasses.  
(Note: These glasses will be layered to demonstrate a progression in reduced visual function so you may need multiple sets of 4 depending on group size.)
- Food presented on a plain plate of similar colour (e.g. plain chicken/rice on a white plate)
- Food presented on a patterned plate of similar colours (e.g. raspberries on a plate with pink floral designs)
- Food on a plate of contrasting colours (e.g. plain chicken on a blue plate).
- Cutlery e.g. spoon, knife and fork

### Optional equipment

- Tablecloths that correspond to foods and plates described above (e.g. raspberries on a plate and table cloth that have similar pink floral designs).
- Glasses that simulate other vision impairments e.g. cataracts.
- The plates handout found in the supporting materials section may be printed out and used instead of plates.

## Downloadable supporting materials



- Slide deck
- Plates handout
- Evaluation form
- Simulation Glasses Information Sheet
- Vision Information Sheet

## Facilitation Instructions

### Setting up:

- Before presenting the activity, set up three stations for each plate of food as described in the equipment section.
- At each station have a set of cutlery and 4 pairs of simulation glasses. The simulation glasses will be layered to demonstrate a progression in reduced visual function i.e., wearing one pair simulates mild loss of vision while wearing more than one pair simulates more severe loss of vision.

### Briefing:

- Prior to starting the activity, please brief the participants on the intent of the simulation.
- For example, you may introduce the topic of reduced visual function with the following:

*"Changes in visual perception can make it difficult for people with dementia to differentiate between objects of similar shapes and colours. As a result, meal times can be quite confusing for people with dementia as they may struggle to recognise food particularly if it is placed on a plate of a similar colour. Therefore it is important to recognise that unfinished meals may not always be due to a person's appetite but their ability to identify the food on their plate*

- Followed by the aim of the activity:

*"The next activity aims to simulate how reduced visual function can impact meal times. During the activity, you will put yourself in the shoes of a person with dementia and imagine how challenging meal times might be. However, it is really important to note that this simulation will not reflect every person's experience of living with dementia."*





15 minutes

## Activity Instructions

1. Prepare the three stations as outlined in the set-up section.
2. At each station instruct students to wear one pair of simulation glasses and attempt to pick up food using the cutlery provided.
3. Ask the student to put on another pair of glasses and close their eyes while another person rearranges the food on the plate.
4. The student wearing the layered simulation glasses will re-attempt to pick up food from the plate using cutlery.
5. Steps 3 and 4 are repeated until the student is wearing four pairs of simulation glasses.
6. The student will then move on to the next station and repeat steps 2- 5.
7. The station with the food and plate of contrasting colours is presented to the student last to demonstrate how plain contrasting colours makes it easier to identify food on a plate.



## Helpful Tips

- If you don't have access to simulation glasses, try covering the lens of an old pair of glasses with vaseline to demonstrate blurred vision.
- It is also useful to use various types of crockery and cutlery e.g. bowls, spoons
- This training scenario can be combined with the eating meals scenario: cutlery and food containers. Set up an additional station for people to wear both the Cambridge simulation gloves and glasses while attempting to use cutlery to eat from different coloured and patterned crockery described above.



## Group Reflection / Discussion



- Following the dementia simulation activity, take some to reflect on individuals' experiences. As this activity may cause distress it is important to check in on how people are feeling.
- Have a group discussion on how one might support a person with dementia during meal times (e.g. using contrasting plates and cutlery, communicating to people what food is on their plate, etc.)
- Consider the impact of different dining environments e.g. home, restaurant, café, hospital, etc.
- Consider some of the signs/behaviors that might indicate a person with dementia is experiencing visual perception difficulties (e.g., not finishing their food, saying they are not hungry, cutting into patterns on a plate, etc.)
- Think about other daily activities when the perception of colours and patterns might affect people with dementia.

## Additional Resources



- **The red plate study:** <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/symptoms-and-diagnosis/sight-hearing-loss>
- **Dining with dementia symptoms:** <https://www.indi.ie/diseases,-allergies-and-medical-conditions/127-neurological-conditions/997-dementia-the-dining-experience.html>
- **Making dining areas dementia-friendly:** <https://www.scie.org.uk/dementia/supporting-people-with-dementia/dementia-friendly-environments/kitchens.asp>