

CAREGIVER GUIDE: SUPPORTING NUTRITION, MENTAL HEALTH, AND ORAL HEALTH



Purpose: A practical guide for caregivers who support a child, teen, or adult experiencing appetite changes, cravings, or restricted eating while on psychiatric or long-term medical treatments.



KEY POINTS AT A GLANCE

- Food patterns influence teeth, gums, energy, and mood.
- Medications can shift appetite, taste, and saliva. These changes can raise cavity risk and alter energy patterns.
- Gentle routines and sensory-aware choices help more than strict rules.
- Small steps add up. Pair sweets with protein, keep water nearby, and protect teeth with fluoride.

HOW MEDICATIONS MAY CHANGE EATING, TASTE, AND SALIVA

Effects vary by person and by medication class.



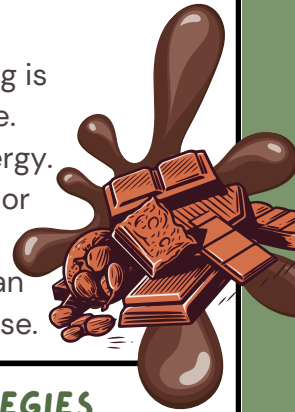
- **Antidepressants (SSRIs, SNRIs):** Dry mouth and taste changes are common. Some individuals notice more interest in sweets.
- **Stimulants for ADHD:** Daytime appetite often drops, with evening rebound hunger. Long gaps without food can lead to grazing on sweet or soft snacks.
- **Antipsychotics:** Appetite may rise, with stronger cravings for sweets and starches. Thirst may increase, which can lead to more sweetened drinks.
- **Mood stabilizers:** Lithium can change taste and increase thirst. Valproate can increase appetite.
- **Other drying medicines:** Anticholinergics and some allergy or nausea medicines reduce saliva.



Why it matters: Saliva protects teeth and neutralizes acids. Less saliva means sugar and acid stay on teeth longer and decay risk rises.

COMPASSIONATE SUPPORT FOR CRAVINGS AND COMFORT EATING

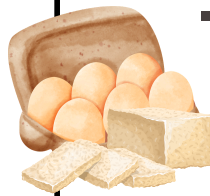
- Normalize stress eating. Comfort eating is common. Shame does not help change.
- Pair sweets with protein to steady energy. Examples include chocolate with nuts or yogurt with fruit.
- Offer a seated, mindful treat rather than all-day nibbling. Follow with a water rinse.



SENSORY-FIRST NUTRITION STRATEGIES

Match foods to the person's preferred textures, temperatures, and flavors.

- **Textures:** Soft and smooth options include yogurt, tofu, eggs, hummus, soups, and smoothies. Crunchy options include apples, carrots, roasted chickpeas, and toasted sandwiches.
- **Temperatures:** Some prefer warm and bland. Others tolerate cold and crisp. Either can work for oral health when followed by a water rinse.
- **Flavors:** Mild flavors often work best during nausea or low appetite. Bright flavors can help when taste is dulled.



Protein-forward ideas that are gentle on teeth

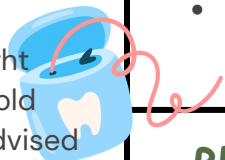
- Greek yogurt or cottage cheese with berries.
- Eggs any style, tofu scramble, or edamame.
- Nut or seed butter on banana or soft bread.
- Beans or lentils in mild soups or blended dips.





SIMPLE ROUTINES THAT PROTECT TEETH AND STABILIZE ENERGY

- Offer small, regular meals or snacks every three to four hours.
- Keep a tooth-friendly snack and water within reach during study, work, or gaming.
- Encourage brushing with fluoride toothpaste twice daily and flossing once daily.
- Use an alcohol-free fluoride rinse at night when dry mouth is present, for people old enough to rinse and spit safely, or as advised by a dentist.
- Ask the dental team about fluoride varnish or prescription-strength fluoride toothpaste or gel.



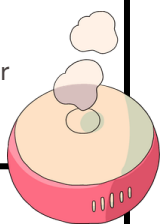
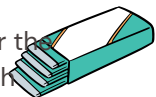
DRINKS GUIDE

- Best daily choices are water, sparkling water, and unsweetened tea.
- If juice is chosen, serve a small glass with a meal.
- Children and teens should avoid energy drinks. For adults who choose an energy drink, consider sugar-free options and avoid sipping all day.
- After any sweet or acidic drink, offer a water rinse.



Dry mouth supports

- Xylitol gum or mints, if available and safe for the person to chew or suck; otherwise rinse with water after meals.
- Saliva substitutes or dry-mouth gels.
- Sip water before bed and keep a glass of water at the bedside.



MEDICATION AND NUTRIENT INTERACTIONS

- Some medicines change how the body uses vitamins or minerals, such as folate, other B vitamins, or magnesium.
- A balanced diet often meets needs, but long-term regimens may call for a review.
- Before adding supplements, ask the prescriber or pharmacist. A registered nutritionist-dietitian (RND) can prioritize food sources and safe options when needed.



BUDGET-FRIENDLY SWAPS

- Plain yogurt plus frozen fruit instead of pre-sweetened cups.
- Homemade trail mix with peanuts, sunflower seeds, and a small amount of chocolate chips.
- Canned tuna or beans with whole-grain crackers, followed by water.
- Oatmeal cooked with milk and topped with nut butter.



PLANNING FOR DENTAL VISITS

- Share medication names and timing, appetite patterns, usual drinks, and any sensory needs.
- Ask for longer, quieter, or first-morning appointments if helpful.
- If cost is a barrier, ask about dental schools, government health centers or rural health units (RHUs), or PhilHealth-covered dental services.
- Bring comfort items such as headphones, a weighted lap pad, or sunglasses.



WORKING WITH THE CARE TEAM

Quick screen to share with the prescriber or dentist

- Appetite has changed since starting or changing a medication.
- Mouth feels dry or taste has changed.
- More cavities, sensitivity, or white patches are present.
- Energy drinks or sweetened beverages are used for focus or comfort.



Helpful phrases

- "They feel less hungry during the day and very hungry at night. How can we adjust timing so eating is easier?"
- "Their mouth feels dry. What options do we have for saliva support or prescription fluoride?"
- "We are open to a referral to a registered nutritionist-dietitian for sensory-friendly, protein-forward ideas."


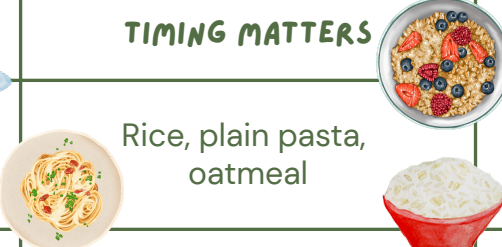




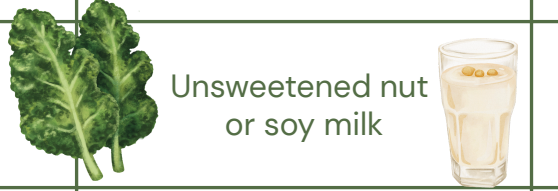


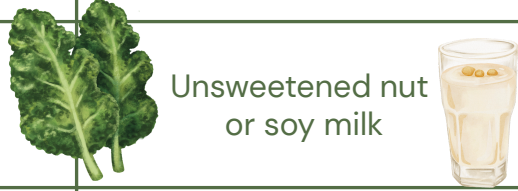





RED FLAGS AND WHEN TO CONTACT A CLINICIAN

- Painful mouth sores, white patches that do not wipe off, or a burning mouth.
- Tooth pain, sensitivity to cold or sweets, or bleeding gums.
- Persistent vomiting, very limited intake, dizziness, or signs of dehydration.
- Rapid weight change or concern about restricted eating.
- Any sudden change after a new medication or dose change.



MINI CHART: LOWER RISK, TIMING MATTERS, HIGHER CAVITY RISK

LOWER RISK	TIMING MATTERS	HIGHER CAVITY RISK
 <p>Cheese, milk, plain yogurt</p>	 <p>Rice, plain pasta, oatmeal</p>	 <p>Sticky sweets, caramels, gummies</p>
 <p>Nuts and seeds</p>	 <p>Soft tortillas, plain crackers with protein</p>	 <p>Dried fruit and fruit leathers</p>
 <p>Eggs, beans, tofu, poultry</p>	 <p>Bananas, firm tofu, potatoes</p>	 <p>Crackers or chips alone, refined breads</p>
 <p>Crunchy vegetables and greens</p>	 <p>Unsweetened nut or soy milk</p>	 <p>Sweetened cereals and pastries</p>
 <p>Whole fruit such as apples and berries</p>		 <p>Sugary drinks, energy and sports drinks</p>

Notes: Foods in the Timing Matters column become higher risk if sipped or nibbled all day without water or oral care.

QUICK TEMPLATE FOR A DAY

- **Breakfast:** Protein plus carbohydrate, such as eggs with toast or yogurt with fruit.
- **Mid-morning:** A small protein snack and water.
- **Lunch:** Simple protein, a starch, and a fruit or vegetable.
- **Afternoon:** Xylitol gum after eating, if available and safe for the person to chew; otherwise rinse with water.
- **Evening:** Balanced dinner, then fluoride rinse if dry mouth is present.
- **Bedtime:** Brush and floss, use any dry-mouth gel if needed.



This guide offers general information and does not replace personalized medical or dental advice.