Finger foods can provide a nutritious and enjoyable alternative to plated meals. They can also be used to provide extra nutritious snacks to those who need them.

They can be particularly useful for people who forget to eat or find co-ordination difficult, such as with dementia or following a stroke.

If a person has a swallowing difficulty finger foods are not usually suitable.

Finger foods can be:
- served at the table in place of a plated meal
- offered as snacks between meals
- left in different places to pick up and eat throughout the day.

**Benefits of finger foods**
- Enable people to feed themselves, helping maintain independence
- Help preserve eating skills
- Can renew interest in food and stimulate appetite
- Can improve food intake
- Can boost confidence and self-esteem at mealtimes
- Offer more choice and freedom to eat as desired
- Don’t need to be served hot, good for people who need time to eat

**Food groups**

Suggestions are divided into the following food groups to help plan a balanced menu:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food group</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High protein</td>
<td>Especially important in older and malnourished people to help reduce risk of falls, infections and pressure ulcers. Include in all main meals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starchy carbs</td>
<td>Important for fibre, vitamins and minerals and energy. Include in all main meals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit and veg</td>
<td>Normally these should represent a third to a half of daily diet. But for someone who is malnourished these are less important because they are lower in calories and protein.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High fat/sugar</td>
<td>High in energy (calories) so good for weight gain, but low in protein.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
High protein finger foods

cold meat pieces
chicken drumsticks
mini sausages
mini burgers
rolled-up ham
pieces of meatloaf
fish fingers/goujons
crab sticks

cooked prawns
scampi pieces
meat/fish on skewer
sushi
boiled egg halved
scotch egg
mini quiche
nut loaf

nuts
cheese cubes
cream cheese rolls
ice-cream cone
frozen yoghurt on sticks
chicken/meat spring rolls
chicken/meat/lentil
samosas or pakoras

To increase calories:
add dip eg full fat mayonnaise, cream cheese, tartare sauce, Greek yogurt. Offer as extra snacks between meals.

To reduce calories:
cut off visible fat, grill/oven bake rather than frying, choose lower fat, lower calorie options.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Starchy carbohydrate finger foods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>toast fingers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cereal bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>small bread rolls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finger sandwiches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eggy bread squares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>malt/fruit loaf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crumpets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ideas for fillings/toppings:** try meat/fish paste, cold meats, squashed tinned fish, tuna or egg mayonnaise, marmite, cream cheese, cheese spread, houmous.

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**To increase calories:**
add butter, full fat mayonnaise, jam, set honey, peanut butter, chocolate or hazelnut spread, clotted cream

**To reduce calories:**
eat in moderation. Rice cakes and popcorn (without butter/sugar) are lower in calories.
## Fruit and vegetable finger foods

- mini or sliced banana
- orange segments
- sliced apple/pear
- grapes and berries
- melon/ pineapple chunks
- peach/nectarine/mango slices with stone removed
- fruit kebab
- dried fruit
- salad sticks (carrot, celery, pepper, cucumber)
- cherry tomatoes
- sugar snap peas
- baby corn
- cooked vegetables – broccoli spears, cauliflower florets, green beans

## To increase calories
Add dip eg houmous, cream cheese, Greek yogurt, clotted cream. Try frying fruit slices in butter and sugar.

## High fat/sugar finger foods and dessert ideas

- sausage rolls
- mini pork pies
- mini scotch eggs
- spring rolls
- bhajis, pakoras, samosas
- mini croissants, pastries, pain au chocolate
- mini brioche rolls
- mini muffins
- fun-size cake bars (remove wrapper)
- iced buns
- cake pieces
- flapjacks
- chocolate cornflake cakes
- funsize chocolates
- biscuits
- ice lolly
- mini fruit pie
- jam tarts, mince pies
- baklava

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**Fruit and vegetable finger foods**

**High fat/sugar finger foods and dessert ideas**
Adapt these menus to take into account individual likes, dislikes and dietary requirements. See tips in earlier sections for ideas to increase or decrease calories.

**Example Menu 1**

**Breakfast**
- Cereal bar and 3-4 dried apricots
- Orange juice
- Tea or coffee

**Mid morning**
- Eggy bread squares, fruit slices
- Tea or coffee

**Lunch**
- Mini beef burgers (90g) in mini bread buns (40g) with tomato sauce, potato wedges, baby corn, Malt loaf

**Mid afternoon**
- Squares of toast with pate or cream cheese
- Tea or coffee

**Evening meal**
- Chicken and vegetable skewers with yogurt dip, salad sticks, pitta slices
- Slice of cake

**Bedtime**
- Milky drink eg Horlicks, Ovaltine, hot chocolate, milkshake

**Example Menu 2**

**Breakfast**
- Hard-boiled egg in quarters
- Toast squares with butter/jam
- Apple juice
- Tea or coffee

**Mid morning**
- Flapjack, fruit slices
- Tea or coffee

**Lunch**
- Mini quiche (100g), baby potatoes (100g), broccoli spears
- Mini fruit pie

**Mid afternoon**
- Cheese cubes and grapes
- Tea or coffee

**Evening meal**
- Mini sandwiches eg tuna mayonnaise, egg mayonnaise, soft cheese, salad sticks
- Mini chocolate cornflake cakes

**Bedtime**
- Milky drink eg Horlicks, Ovaltine, hot chocolate, milkshake

**Tips when offering a finger food menu**
- Menu needs to be creative and varied
- Present food attractively, eg attractive plate, different coloured foods
- Use foods that are easy to hold. For people who wander choose foods that can be eaten on the move or carried in a pouch
- People’s capabilities can change, finger foods might be better at certain mealtimes and plated meals at others
- Show the person what to do so they can copy
- Allow time to look at the food and explore it
- Take time to describe the food
- Some foods will lose their freshness and appeal if left out for too long, so may need replacing
- Provide wipes or hot flannels to wipe hands before/after meals
Further information

Eating Well with a Small Appetite – ask the person who gave you this leaflet

Nourishing Drinks for Adults – ask the person who gave you this leaflet

Eating and drinking with dementia - ask the person who gave you this leaflet

Eating well: supporting older people and older people with dementia – practical guide, published by The Caroline Walker Trust, available at cwt.org.uk/publications

Alzheimer’s Society guide to catering for people with dementia, published by the Alzheimer’s Society, available at alzheimers.org.uk

Contact information

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The Trust’s Patient Information Service is here to help you to
• Find out more about a health condition or treatment
• Find a local support group
• Learn about healthy living
• Learn about living with a long term health condition
• Make good choices about your healthcare

The Patient Information Service is at Airedale General Hospital
Tel: 01535 294413  Email: your.health@anhst.nhs.uk
Web: www.airedale-trust.nhs.uk/YourHealth

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