

10 Senior Mealtime Challenges

Research conducted for the Home Instead Senior Care® network reveals 10 mealtime challenges for older adults. The following percentages refer to the number of seniors who believe these are challenges for older people who live alone. After each are tips for how to make the most of mealtimes, from the Home Instead Senior Care network and Sandy Markwood of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging.



1. Lack of companionship during mealtimes (62%)

Tip: If you can't be there to dine with a loved one regularly, look for alternative options such as friends and neighbors. Check out special activities at churches and senior centers as well as the local Area Agency on Aging and Home Instead Senior Care resources.

2. Cooking for one (60%)

Tip: Freeze most any type of leftovers including sliced and seeded fruit by placing it in plastic containers or freezer bags. Buy your senior healthier low-sodium dinners for one.

3. Eating nutritious meals (56%)

Tip: Buy fresh, when possible, or frozen foods including fruits and vegetables. Frequent affordable farmer's markets in season. Your older loved one may enjoy perusing the racks of produce. If your senior is able, help plant a garden.

4. Grocery shopping for one (56%)

Tip: Transportation can be a big issue for seniors. Contact the local Area Agency on Aging and Home Instead Senior Care office, or encourage your loved one to engage neighborhood support systems when possible.

5. Eating three meals a day (49%)

Tip: So many seniors are on prescription medications that must be taken with or without food. Coordinate the food plan with the medication plan. "Remember, Dad, to take this pill when you're eating oatmeal for breakfast."

6. High expense of cooking for one (45%)

Tip: Encourage shared meals when possible – your older loved one will get the benefit of reduced costs of meals as well as companionship. Check out your local senior center, which often offers affordable meals for older adults, as well as the home-delivered meals program, known as "Meals On Wheels®."

7. Relying too much on convenience food (43%)

Tip: Encourage your older adult to meet with a nutritionist or talk with the doctor to learn how to read labels. So many older adults don't know the foods that are good and bad for them.

8. Loss of appetite (41%)

Tip: Help older adults make mealtimes an event, which can make dining more appealing. Pull out a favorite recipe, help that older adult prepare a meal, get out the good dishes and decorate the table with real or artificial flowers.

9. Eating too much food (38%)

Tip: The bigger issue is eating too much of the wrong types of food. If you're helping an older loved one with a shopping list or grocery shopping, encourage healthier choices.

10. Eating too little food (35%)

Tip: Plan a trip to a favorite restaurant for a special dish. If lack of food is an ongoing problem, check with your senior's doctor to learn about supplemental products that could ensure an older adult is getting the proper nutrition.

For more information about the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, go to www.n4a.org. Learn about the Home Instead Senior Care network's Craving CompanionshipSM program at www.mealsandcompanionship.com or contact your local Home Instead Senior Care office.