

# New method improves eating skills of dementia patients

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A pioneering international study involving academics from the University of Sheffield has shown for the first time that it is possible to improve the eating skills and nutritional status of older people with dementia.

The study, which was published in the [International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry](#) and funded by the National Health Research Institutes of Taiwan, tested two separate intervention methods to assess the eating patterns of [dementia](#) patients in Taiwan.

Loss of memory and problems with judgement in dementia patients can cause difficulties in relation to eating and nutrition. Poor [eating habits](#) in patients have been associated with poor quality of life and can lead to pressure ulcers and infections.

The study used two different step-by-step training programmes to help older people with dementia regain eating skills which are commonly lost. The methods were then compared with no intervention. Patients were tested using a range of measures including their feeding difficulty score and nutritional assessment. Results showed that both methods of intervention reduced their difficulty feeding score and improved their nutritional assessment when compared with no intervention.

The study was led by Professor Li-Chan Lin, a former Leverhulme Visiting Professor at the University of Sheffield, from the National Yang-Min University in Taipei, Taiwan. Professor Roger Watson, from the

University of Sheffield's School of Nursing and Midwifery, developed the primary measure for feeding difficulty and also consulted with the author on the design of the study and interpretation of the results.

Professor Watson said: "Nutritional problems of older people with dementia are dangerous for the person with dementia, distressing for friends and relatives and very hard to treat. This is just a start, but the study demonstrates that something can be done and it lays the foundation for a promising line of enquiry."

Provided by University of Sheffield

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