

Helping dementia patients remember to eat well improves physical and mental health

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A new analysis has found that a combination of methods that help patients with dementia remember proper eating habits can improve their physical health and lessen symptoms of depression. Published early online in the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, the study indicates that clinicians should consider using this intervention in individuals with dementia who also have poor nutrition and signs of depression.

In patients with dementia, [poor nutrition](#) or decreased food intake may cause [symptoms of depression](#). Investigators including Li-Chan Lin, RN, PhD, of the National Yang-Ming University, in Taipei, Taiwan, tested the effectiveness of a combination of methods to train patients with dementia to remember proper eating habits. The intervention incorporated a method called spaced retrieval—a kind of [memory training](#) that requires an individual to recall a piece of information at increasing time intervals—and Montessori-based activities, through which structured activities related to daily life are sequentially and repetitively practiced.

Twenty-five participants received spaced retrieval combined with Montessori-based activities with a total of 24 fixed group sessions. Thirty-eight participants received the same intervention with sessions that were adjusted according to each participant's learning response. Twenty-seven [control participants](#) just received routine care. Tests for depression, [body mass index](#), and nutrition were conducted before and after the sessions, as well as at one, three, and six months later.

The tests revealed that nutrition improved and body mass index increased over time for individuals receiving either type of intervention with spaced retrieval and Montessori-based activities. Also, depression scores were reduced in parallel with nutrition improvement in participants who received interventions adjusted according to each participant's learning response.

"It has been shown that spaced retrieval or Montessori-based activities can improve eating ability. In our research, besides improving eating ability, improved nutrition, increased body mass index, and a moderating effect on depressive symptoms are produced by spaced retrieval combined with Montessori-based activities," said Dr. Lin. "We expect that this combined intervention can produce greater effects than spaced retrieval or Montessori-based activities can alone."

More information: "The moderating effect of nutritional status on depressive symptoms in veteran elders with dementia: A spaced retrieval combined with Montessori-based activities." Hua-Shan Wu, RN, PhD, and Li-Chan Lin, RN PhD. Journal of Advanced Nursing; Published Online: February 28th, 2013 ([DOI: 10.1111/jan.12097](https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.12097)).

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