

Worksheet 16:

Specialists involved in supporting people with dementia to eat and drink safely

Speech and language therapist

Speech and language therapists (SLTs) provide life-improving treatment, support and care for children and adults who experience difficulties with communication, eating, drinking or swallowing.

SLTs assess and treat speech, language and communication problems in people of all ages to help them communicate better. They also assess, treat and develop personalised plans to support people who have eating and swallowing problems. Using specialist skills, SLTs work directly with clients and their carers and provide them with tailored support. They also work closely with teachers and other health professionals such as doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and psychologists to develop individual treatment programmes.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) position paper *Speech and Language Therapy Provision for People with Dementia* (2014) makes several key recommendations and advises that “communication and swallowing are the responsibility of the whole team – the role of the speech and language therapist is to empower and educate others as well as providing direct specialist input as appropriate.”

Dietician

Dietitians are qualified and regulated health professionals that assess, diagnose and treat dietary and nutritional problems at an individual and wider public health level.

Dietitians use the most up-to-date public health and scientific research on food, health and disease, which they translate into practical guidance to enable people to make appropriate lifestyle and food choices. They work with healthy and sick people in the NHS and in private clinics. They can also work in the food industry, catering, education, sports and the media. Other care pathways they work in include mental health, learning disabilities, community, acute settings and public health.

Dietitians interpret the science of nutrition to improve health and treat diseases and conditions by educating and giving practical advice to clients, patients, carers and colleagues. They advise and help to maintain nutritional status when individuals want to trial dietary interventions such as exclusion diets or nutritional supplementation.