

Feeding difficulties in people with dementia: an academic research path

Lígia Passos^{1,2*}, João Tavares³, Melissa Batchelor⁴, Daniela Figueiredo³

¹ Center for Health Technology and Services Research (CINTESIS.UA), Department of Education and Psychology, University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal

² Institute of Biomedical Sciences Abel Salazar, University of Porto, Porto, Portugal

³ Center for Health Technology and Services Research (CINTESIS.UA), School of Health Sciences, University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal

⁴ George Washington University, School of Nursing, Washington, D.C., USA

* Correspondence: ligiamaria@ua.pt



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INTRODUCTION

Dementia is a chronic/progressive syndrome characterized by the deterioration of cognitive function and the ability to perform daily activities, beyond the expected in primary aging¹. In Portugal, it is estimated that 182.000 people live with dementia², with about 19.9 cases per thousand inhabitants, being the 4th country with more cases in the world³.

In advanced stages, people with dementia may have feeding difficulties, usually manifested by oropharyngeal dysphagia, low food/fluids intake, refusal to eat, aversive behaviors^{4,5}, leading to malnutrition, dehydration, pulmonary aspiration and reduced functionality⁶.

The assessment of feeding difficulties, considering intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental factors, is the first step towards an adequate intervention.

MASTER – 2018/2020

- Master in Applied Gerontology – University of Aveiro
- “Feeding and dementia: Contributions to the validation of the Edinburgh Feeding Evaluation in Dementia and the Feeding Skills Checklist”

Objective: to adapt and validate the Edinburgh Feeding Evaluation in Dementia (EdFED) and Feeding Skills Checklist” (FSC) for the Portuguese population. Second, to analyse internal consistency and inter-observer reliability, and also to characterize eating and feeding practices by analysing the relationship between the participants' sociodemographic variables and the results of EdFED and FSC.



PhD – 2020 to 2024

- PhD Degree in Gerontology and Geriatrics – University of Aveiro and University of Porto
- “Feeding difficulties in institutionalized people with dementia: a social-ecological approach”

Objective: to analyse the effectiveness of the “Feeding Older adults with Dementia – Eat, Assist and Train (FOoD-EAT), an intervention program aiming to reduce the feeding difficulties of institutionalized people with dementia.

Specific objectives:

- to identify existing interventions and their effectiveness in the feeding difficulties of people with dementia, to design a social-ecological-based intervention program;
- to implement and evaluate the feasibility and acceptability of the FOoD-EAT through a pilot study;
- to analyse the effects of the FOoD-EAT on food intake and nutritional status of people with dementia, and skills and job satisfaction of nursing assistants, through a cluster randomized controlled study;
- to disseminate good practices and guidelines to help increasing the quality of care in nursing homes.

METHODS

To achieve the goals, 5 tasks will be performed during 48 months.

Task 1: Scoping Review (work in progress)	Task 2: Design of the FOoD-EAT	Task 3: Pilot study	Task 4: Cluster randomized controlled trial	Task 5: Thesis' writing
To identify interventions in feeding difficulties available for institutionalized people with dementia	- The George Washington University - Training on C3P Model - Design of the FOoD-EAT	To test the FOoD-EAT acceptability, feasibility and preliminary effects	4 nursing homes from Aveiro: two allocated in the control group, and the other two in the experimental group	For each task, scientific oral and written communications, and publications (papers)

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Food and mealtime play a social, religious, biological, and symbolic role in most cultures. Respecting the current recommendations of international scientific societies, valuing the dignity and care for people with dementia, it is expected that the FOoD-EAT intervention will improve the feeding practices in nursing homes, as well as the nutritional status and well-being of people with dementia.

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