For many of us, eating is one of the joys of our day. However, when dementia begins to steal skill from our fingers, it can turn what was once enjoyable into a frustrating experience. If we see someone we care about struggling with eating, or other tasks which once were second nature, we surely want to help. The only question is: How do we help them recover that joy?

Many caregivers use one of two ways to *feed* people:

1. **direct hand (DH)** feeding, where the caregiver sticks the spoon directly into the mouth of the person living with dementia, or
2. **hand over hand (HOH)** feeding, where the caregiver wraps the person’s hand over the spoon and then wraps their hand over the back of the person’s hand.

PAC would like you to consider a third option to help someone eat:

3. **Hand-under-Hand™ (HuH™)** is a technique in which the care partner has their hand under the hand of a person living with dementia. Their palms are touching, which offers a comforting and supportive connection. This frees the skill fingers of the care partner to hold the utensil while the person living with dementia is providing the strength. This allows for a natural eating movement and triggers muscle memory, giving the person living with dementia the feeling of control.

Teepa developed the HuH™ technique as a way of doing a task *with* someone instead of doing it *to* them. (HuH™ can do much more than help someone eat, but we will stick to meal time use for now.) You may have noticed we used the word *feeding* when we talk about the first two techniques yet we say *helping someone eat* when describing HuH™. In both direct hand and hand over hand, the person is being given care and is passively must accept it. In Hand-under-Hand™ the care partner is helping the other eat, but they are both active participants. This person centered approach has proven to improve sense of self worth.

HuH™ may sound like a good idea, the concern for many busy caregivers is whether it will take too long, or if it even works at all. Fortunately, there has been research done comparing the three techniques.

**Research on HuH™** Researchers at Duke University conducted an experimental study to compare the impact of meal intake using the three common techniques: direct hand (DH), hand over hand (HOH) feeding, and (HuH™), as pictured here. Their study found several things:
• **Amount of Food**: People living with dementia ate the **most** food with both Hand-under-Hand™ (HuH™) and direct hand (DH) feeding. People living with dementia ate the **least** with hand over hand (HOH)

• **Time it took**: The amount of time it took for caregivers to help someone eat was about the same for all three techniques—good news for busy caregivers: no one technique is faster!

• **Resisting being Fed**: The greatest resistance to *feeding* happened when the researchers used hand over hand (HOH) and direct hand (DH) feeding. When they *helped people to eat* using Hand-under-Hand™, those living with dementia didn’t turn their head away or clamp their lips shut nearly as much as the other two techniques. (Batchelor-Aselage, Amella Rose & Bales in Handbook of Clinical Nutrition and Aging, Eds. Bales, Locher & Saltzman, 2015).

So what do I do now? Get Curious:

• Take a look at the videos we have at Positive Approach™ to try Hand-under-Hand™.
• See what happens when I help someone eat—do they *tell* me through touch what they want with the slightest push-back of their hand? Do they like potatoes but hate cooked carrots?
• Think about how this makes me feel as I sit beside them and help them eat. How are you better connected at that moment?
• Try Hand-under-Hand™ with other **care partnering** moments in your day. Where else can a care partner engage someone living with dementia to do more for him/herself?

Let’s move from *feeding* those living with dementia to helping them eat—let’s make meals enjoyable again!