Finger food intervention for patients with eating difficulties
K. Tuinier (RN), W. Weststrate (RN), J. Hoogendoorn (RN), M. van Koeve ringe (RN), H. van der Werf (RN), M. de Rijke (PhD) and B. Buijck (PhD)

Background
Finger food is a way of offering food to patients with eating difficulties, for example patients with dementia, stroke or Parkinson disease. Eating is one of the most important activities in human life and the way food is eaten is mostly cultural determined. One of the western habits is to eat with utensil. Even though, more than half of the patients in nursing homes have difficulties (in recognizing or handling) if eating with utensil. The aim of this practice based study was to explore the experiences of patients, their relatives and caregivers with finger food.

Methods
This was an observational and survey research. In a nursing home, patients with dementia were observed during finger food meals and regular meals. Caregivers and patients’ relatives filled in a Likert scale questionnaire in which they were asked about their values concerning finger food: eating with fingers, hygiene and patients’ independency. The questionnaire was developed after a literature study. Data were analyzed by using SPSS version 20.

Results
Five patients were observed during three finger food meals and during three regular meals. The patients took a mean 239 grams of a regular meal when a nurse helped them, and 195 grams of an independent eaten finger food meal. The regular meal took them a mean 26 minutes to eat and the finger food meal 27 minutes. Patients expressed more positive feelings during the finger food meal compared to the regular meal. During the finger food meal the patients received less help with eating. Sixty percent of the relatives and 94% of the caregivers had a positive opinion about finger food. Fifty percent of the relatives believed that finger food influenced independency of patients positively, compared to 88% of the caregivers.

Discussion
Patients needed less help during the finger food meals. Finger food contributes to patients’ independency and more positive feelings about eating. The higher weight (in grams) for regular meals may be due to more moist in the meals (milk, butter, water), which contributes to easier swallowing when nurses are feeding patients. More research on this subject is needed.