



Mealtimes Matter!

Meals are to be recognized as significant activities.

The meal does not start with the appearance of food on the table, and it doesn't end with the last bite. It encompasses various aspects including the preparation of the food, the anticipation of the meal, preparing the dining room, the invite to the meal, the conversations during mealtime, the food and its pleasure, eating with dignity, the end of the meal and cleaning up.

It's important to realize that the residents' experience around mealtime extends far beyond the food. Activities occurring before and after meals, timing of the meals, the way in which menu choices are offered, how the meal is introduced, social interactions at the dining room table, all need to be actively considered. Each one of these parts affects the residents' mealtime experience and consequently, their nutritional status.



Feeding a resident.

A number of residents in Long Term Care require a staff member to feed them. This is an intimate activity that staff shares with residents on a day-to-day basis. Some techniques for feeding include:

- Informing the resident what is on the dish
- Bring the spoon up to where the resident can see it
- Give the person time to open his/her mouth
- Don't scrape the person's lips with the spoon; use a napkin or a damp cloth

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Creating an Optimal Mealtime Experience

- Make eye contact each time you speak to someone
- Know what you are serving
- Use colours and textures to create contrast so the resident is able to see items on his/her plate and items on the table
- Interaction at the table, whether serving, feeding, or keeping company is a very special interval in the day
- Eliminate distracting stimuli
- No conversations among staff that do not include the residents

Feeding is one of the most important relationship-bonding activities that caregivers share with their residents.

Maintaining Independence

Decreased use of utensils

- Only offer utensils needed, use hand-over-hand technique to promote self-feeding
- Try adaptive devices (large handled utensils)

Playing or mixing foods

- Offer one food at a time
- Place foods in individual bowls and serve liquids in a mug with a lid
- Put condiments on food prior to serving the meal
- Redirect and provide verbal cues

Residents who use fingers to eat

- Simplify meals (develop finger food menu; to support residents' desire to maintain self-feeding and provides nutrition on the go for those who wander or pace)
- Reduce the need for decision making, serve one food at a time
- Cut food into small pieces before serving



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