

Help Sheet No.3

Quality dining room service

Food provides nourishment that is vital to the health and wellbeing of residents. Mealtimes offer opportunities for social interaction. The atmosphere in the dining room influences the residents' enjoyment of food.

This sheet gives guidelines on dining room design to enhance the pleasure of meal times.

Access

The dining room needs to be easily accessible and provide a relaxed, comfortable environment that encourages people to stay and enjoy their meal and is welcoming to carers and family.

Style

Consider the era and style most relevant to residents.

Timing of meals

Appetite is enhanced by spacing meal and snack times over the day. Provide three main meals and three between meal snacks with beverages. Generally, there should be 14 hours or less between the evening meal and breakfast. Best practice would be a flexible approach to mealtimes where possible.

Some residents may need food and fluids at other times to optimise intake. For example, residents may need to access food and fluids during the night.

Colour

Restful colours for wall and furnishings, for example, pastels with contrasting stronger shades, create a relaxed eating atmosphere.

Furniture

Practical table and chair arrangements allow for ease of movement and sufficient space for staff to assist with meals. Table heights may need to vary for people to eat comfortably from wheelchairs or from standard chairs with arms. A mixture of table sizes will allow for smaller or larger groups to sit together. Round tables can be suitable for small groups. Square or oblong shapes can be joined.

Lighting

The room should be well lit for safety and to enhance food appearance. Make the most of natural light – windows, garden aspect or skylights.

Consider the level of glare in the room as this can affect people with a visual impairment.

Table decorations and linen

Use attractive and coordinated linen, crockery and cutlery. Decorate tables with flowers, candles or ornaments, varied for different occasions. A pleasant

environment, appropriate for the culture of the residents, can enhance mealtimes and contribute to wellbeing.

Noise level

Extra noise can be unpleasant and distracting for those who need to concentrate on eating. While the kitchen needs to be next to the dining room, limit kitchen noise in the dining room. Turn the television off unless residents want to watch it. Quiet background music provides a relaxed atmosphere. The atmosphere should encourage conversation.

Residents who have difficulty concentrating or who are disruptive may benefit from eating in a less distracting environment away from the main area. One nursing home has called this option the 'cosy corner'.

Residents should have a choice about where and with whom they eat.

Eating outdoors

Outdoor eating changes the routine and provides opportunities for sunlight exposure, which is important for vitamin D status. However, when UV light and heat are at their strongest, use a shaded area. Even ground, ease of access and comfortable seating remain important.

[Use outdoor areas for special event meals such as resident's birthdays, Melbourne Cup lunch or other celebrations, or have a regular day for a barbecue.](#)

Temperature

Room temperature is important for enjoyment of eating. Protect from drafts and have adequate heating and cooling.

Providing options

How flexible is your facility in providing for the day to day preferences of residents on where they wish to eat? For example, some may like to eat in their room.

If budget does not stretch to making major improvements, plan for changes over time.

Expert advice

- Ask residents how they would like the dining room and other areas to look.
- Observe what others in the field have done.
- Seek expert advice from an architect, occupational therapist, interior decorator or food service planning expert.
- Obtain reference materials from libraries, including those of tertiary institutions that have architectural, allied health and catering schools.

Adapted from Stewart A., (1999), *Nutrition guidelines for residential aged care facilities* (unpublished) Contact Alison Stewart, Consultant Dietitian.