

Help sheet 7:

Nutrition related activities in group settings

As people age they may lose the ability to provide food for themselves, depending on their level of functioning. One of the contributors to decreasing levels of function could be inadequate physical activity. The processes of shopping, cooking and social eating help to maintain our interest in food. They encourage greater food variety and may improve the amount of food and drinks that people consume. The greater the food variety, the better the quality of the diet.

As we age, our need for energy decreases, while the requirements for nutrients like protein, vitamins and minerals either remain the same or increase. Therefore:

Older people need to eat better, not less.

Older people are more likely to suffer from illnesses or conditions that increase their energy needs and at such times will require special care to ensure these needs are met.

It is not uncommon for fun or treat foods to be promoted in group situations. These are often associated with cultural, religious or birthday occasions. Good nutrition habits can be similarly encouraged in the group setting.

In promoting good nutrition, coordinators need to understand:

- the functional capacity and health needs of individuals in the group and any special dietary issues
- cultural or religious issues about food relevant to the group – in order to determine appropriate foods and information to be presented
- dietary guidelines for HACCC services in the Victorian HACCC program manual (2003)
- food groups with recommendations on serves
- nutrition issues associated with ageing.

Depending on the older person's level of function, it may be appropriate to provide nutrition information or to simply reinforce important nutrition behaviours.

Activity suggestions

For older people who are still able to participate in shopping and cooking

- Demonstrate the use of microwaves to thaw, cook and reheat. This equipment is still new technology to older people.
- Participate in cooking foods using new or older cooking styles. There may be food safety issues in this activity. Refer to Help sheet 6 in this Resource Kit.
- Learning how to cook for one (see details of Cooking Small, Eating Well program under 'More information').
- Simplified label reading activities.
- Trips to a produce market or a supermarket tour.
- Create a pyramid or a 'plate' with foods from different groups.
- Find recipes for the different food groups.

It is also important to monitor an older person's function to ensure they maintain their ability to shop and cook for themselves, as long as they can safely do so. If a person is beginning to lose their independence, perhaps further assessment from a physiotherapist or occupational therapist may be warranted.

Being physically strong, having good balance and confidence can assist with maintaining independence in shopping and cooking.

For older people who have more dependency on others to provide for their food needs

- Demonstrate how to eat well when being provided with a delivered meal.
- Virtual supermarket tour – bring list of foods in supermarket aisles, food packets and pictures to a group for discussion.
- Demonstrate cheap and easy snacks using canned and convenience foods.
- Try different snacks, such as pikelets, fruit loaf, cake, cheese platter or dips.

Consider themed activities based on food groups, encourage variety in foods consumed. Create posters or collages for decorating dining areas or transforming into personalised placemats. Also see Help sheet 4 in this Resource Kit, 'Increasing variety at mealtimes', for ideas about celebrations.

Seasonal produce can be the basis of themes for craft activities, tastings, cooking demonstrations, and reminiscence activities. For example:

Spring

Food group – fruit: cherries in late spring, newer fruits, such as mangoes

Food group – vegetable: broad beans, asparagus, peas in the pod

Food group – cereals: picnic sandwiches

Summer

Food group – fruit: berries, stone fruit

Food group – vegetables: tomatoes, lettuces and salads

Food group – cereals: rice and pasta salads

Autumn (harvest time)

Food group – fruit: pears, apples, figs, quinces, nashi pears and persimmons

Food group – vegetables: pumpkins and squash

Food group – cereals: hot cross buns

Winter

Food group – fruit: citrus, rhubarb, tangelos, pink grapefruit and kiwi fruit

Food group – vegetables: cabbages, brussel sprouts and cauliflower

Food group – cereals: barley, rice and pasta in soups

Encouraging good nutrition with people can give them the energy to maintain a good level of physical activity and provide the 'building blocks' to stay strong.

For more information

Information on the dietary guidelines can be found in Sections 7.7.2 to 7.7.5 of the *Victorian Home and Community Care (HACC) Program Manual* (Department of Human Services, 2003). You may need to consult a dietitian to discuss the application of the guide to the very frail older population.

Identifying and planning assistance for home-based adults at nutritional risk: a resource manual (Department of Human Services, 2001) has extensive information on issues affecting frail older people, particularly Sections 4 and 5. Community dietitians can provide staff education and help develop activities.

Brochures on eating well for older people:

- *Healthy eating, healthy ageing*, copies can be obtained by emailing vic@daa.asn.au
- *Adding life to your years*, copies can be obtained from Nutrition Australia at www.nutritionaustralia.org

Cooking small, eating well, is a practical program for community workers to assist older people to eat well. Contact for further information: Hawthorn Community Education Project, 31 Wakefield Street, Hawthorn, 3122.

The 'Go for your life' website contains information and practical tips on ways to be more active and improve nutrition. The website includes information on healthy snacks and takeaways. 'Go for your life' is a component of the Victorian Government's Healthy and Active Victoria Strategy that aims to improve the overall health and wellbeing of all Victorians by increasing levels of physical activity, improving eating habits, getting people involved with their community and acting as volunteers.

<http://www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au> or 1300 73 98 99