

Vitamin D is important for both bone and muscle strength and is necessary for calcium absorption (NHMRC, 1999). Vitamin D is mostly gained through the action of sunlight on skin and in lesser amounts through the diet from Northern Hemisphere fatty fish, such as herring and mackerel, and Vitamin D fortified margarine and milk. People who remain indoors are at high risk of deficiency of this vitamin, making them more prone to bone fractures. Note that glass and sunscreens block the important rays from the sun which make Vitamin D.

To maintain good Vitamin D levels, it is recommended that hands, face and arms without sunscreen are exposed directly to sunlight for short periods on most days. Note that it is still important to avoid extended sunlight exposure between 10 am and 2 pm in the Summer months (or 11 am and 3 pm daylight saving time) because of the risk of skin damage. Easy access to shade and use of sunscreen during extended exposure periods are essential and drinks are important for prevention of dehydration. If a client is unlikely to receive adequate sunlight exposure, it is recommended that they seek advice from their general practitioner.

When varying the environment or style of eating, ensure you follow your food safety plan: refer to Help sheet 6 in this Resource Kit, 'Food safety issues for group settings'.

Help sheet 4:

Increasing variety at mealtimes

A change of environment or style of eating is stimulating and adds interest. See if you can add any of the following to your yearly planner to increase food variety and the social experience for clients.

Religious celebrations

Many religious celebrations fall on weekends or public holidays when programs are not operating, however you can still celebrate around the time. Examples include:

- Christmas day: traditional British fare or an Australian style meal with seafood or a BBQ.
- Shrove Tuesday: pancakes.
- Good Friday and Easter Sunday: there are many different Christian meal traditions worldwide for Easter. For example, Greeks celebrate with red hard-boiled eggs, Easter lamb soup (Magerista), Easter bread, lamb-spit roast, vegetables, salads and cakes including baklava.
- Hanukkah, the festival of lights, is celebrated by Jews over eight days in December. Fried foods are popular during this feast including latkes (potato pancakes) and sufganiyot (doughnuts).
- Hindus celebrate Navratri which involves feasting for nine days.

Birthdays celebrations

Enjoy a birthday cake and candles to celebrate clients' and staff members' birthdays.

Barbecues and picnics

Eating outdoors is an Australian tradition! Try cuisine styles from other countries to provide a different style of BBQ or picnic. BBQs and picnics are important for the social experience but also for sunlight exposure for Vitamin D.

Varying the environment or style of eating can also involve physical activity. Consider dining in an area that people need to take a short walk to, such as an outdoor BBQ spot.

Regular events

Consider planning regular events, such as:

- cocktail parties: finger foods and non-alcoholic punch
- 'Sunday roast' lunch: serve alcohol with the meal if appropriate to client group
- special afternoon or morning teas.

Example: A program with a number of Italian older people might regularly hold Bocce picnic days. This is an entertaining way to promote nutrition and physical activity for participants.

Special event days

Most programs don't operate on public holidays but these occasions can still be celebrated around the time. Examples include:

- New Years Eve/Day: champagne and chicken, BBQ
- Australia Day: 'bush tucker', pavlova, BBQ, toast and vegemite, peach melba, damper
- Easter parade: hot cross buns, Easter eggs, fish
- Anzac Day: ANZAC biscuits
- Queen's birthday: Devonshire teas, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding
- Show day: Fairy floss, hot dogs, 'show bags' with different foods
- Football finals: meat pies
- Cup Day: Cup Day picnic, chicken and champagne
- other significant sporting events
- feast days from other cultures: for example, Chinese New Year - stir fried vegetables, noodles, new year pudding, pineapple jam tarts, fruit and nuts; Dutch St Nikolaas Day (5 December) - marzipan and a chocolate first letter of your name.

Nostalgia foods

Ask clients about their favourite meals from childhood or early married days, such as brains in white sauce, lambs fry and bacon, or rabbit stew. But remember, not everyone has fond memories of these foods!

Adapted from Stewart A. (1999) Nutrition guidelines for residential aged care facilities (unpublished), Contact Alison Stewart, Consultant Dietitian, Ph: 0417 589 695.

References

Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health (1995) *A world of food: a manual to assist in the provision of culturally appropriate meals for elderly people*, Canberra

NHMRC (1999), *Dietary guidelines for older Australians*, Canberra.

Nowson, CA, Diamond TH, Pasco, JA, Mason, RS, Sambrook, PN, Eisman, JA (2004) Vitamin D in Australia Issues and Recommendations, *Australian Family Physician*, Vol 33 (3): 133–138

Nowson, CA, Diamond TH, Pasco, JA, Mason, RS, Sambrook, PN, Eisman, JA, Wark JD (2005) Vitamin D and adult bone health in Australia and New Zealand: a position statement in *Medical Journal of Australia*, 182 (6): 281–285

Variety and celebration at mealtimes can make eating more interesting.