

Help sheet 3:

Designing a quality dining area

This help sheet provides ideas for service providers, such as Coordinators of Planned Activity Groups (PAGs), on designing dining areas within their centre. PAGs' major focus is to provide a planned program of activity directed at enhancing skills required for daily living. Meals are provided when people attend during lunchtime.

The atmosphere in the dining area can affect the older person's enjoyment of food. The dining area should provide a relaxed, comfortable environment that encourages people to enjoy their meal.

Where facilities are limited, even tablecloths and a small posy of flowers can brighten the atmosphere. Quiet background music may enhance the setting. If possible, older people should have a choice about where and with whom they wish to eat.

Building, renovating and decorating dining areas

Consider the following guidelines when planning to build, renovate or decorate your dining area:

Style

Consider the era and style that is most relevant to clients. This may vary according to the age and culture of clients.

Colour

Use restful colours for walls and furnishings, for example, pastels with contrasting stronger shades in pleasing combinations and patterns. These are more likely to impart a relaxed eating atmosphere than bright primary colours.

Lighting

The room should be well lit for safety and to enhance food appearance. While building design may be a limitation, where possible, maximise use of natural light. Windows, a garden aspect or skylights will bring in more natural light.

Check the level of glare in the room, as this can cause difficulties for older people with a visual impairment.

Temperature

Room temperature is important for enjoyment of eating. Ensure protection from drafts, adequate heating and air-conditioning to achieve good temperatures throughout the year.

Noise level

Extra noise can be unpleasant and distracting for those who need to concentrate fully on tasks, including eating. While it is necessary for the kitchen to be next to the dining area, excessive kitchen noise should not be heard in the dining area. Quiet background music could provide a relaxed atmosphere for older people throughout the meal. The atmosphere should encourage conversation between people.

Furniture

Arrange tables and chairs to allow for ease of movement and sufficient space for staff to assist in serving meals. Also, table heights may need to vary for older people to eat comfortably from their wheelchairs or from standard chairs with arms.

Have a mixture of table sizes to allow for smaller or larger groups to sit together. Round tables that seat 4–6 people can be appealing but generally take up more space. Square or oblong shapes allow you to join tables together for special functions.

Table decorations and linen

Use attractive and coordinated tablecloths, serviettes, crockery and cutlery to create a pleasant eating environment. Table decorations could include floral arrangements or ornaments, varied for different occasions. A pleasant environment, appropriate for the culture and background of the clients, can enhance the experience of mealtimes and contribute to wellbeing.

Outdoor catering

Use outdoor areas for special event meals, such as birthdays, Melbourne Cup lunch or other celebrations, or have a regular day for a barbecue. Outdoor eating provides a change to routine. It also increases opportunities to undertake some appropriate physical activity and have sunlight exposure, which is important for Vitamin D status (see Help sheet 4 in this Resource Kit). However, when UV light and/or heat are at their strongest, a shaded area is recommended. Even ground, ease of access and comfortable seating are important.

Costs

If the budget does not stretch to making major improvements in all areas at once, plan for coordinated changes.

Expert advice

- Seek opinions from a client focus group about how they would like a dining area 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.

References

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

Department of Human Services (2003) *Victorian Home and Community Care (HACC) Program Manual*, pp. 57–58.

Ensuring that clients are relaxed and comfortable will encourage them to enjoy their meals.