



For The Aged Care Sector

NUTRITION FACT SHEET

Getting The Mealtime Experience Right In Aged Care

For aged care residents, mealtimes are a major part of their daily activities. Beyond nutrition, food can also be associated with meanings, traditions and memories, which all combine to influence residents' mealtime expectations. In addition, research has shown that residents' perceptions of quality of life are strongly linked with eating, nutrition and meals. In this fact sheet, we explore the importance of creating a positive mealtime experience for aged care residents.

KEY MESSAGES

1. Negative mealtime experiences = Risks

→ Weight loss, malnutrition, falls, poor health.

2. Positive mealtime experiences = Benefits

→ Nutrition, socialisation, well-being → Less risk.

3. Strategies for positive experience:

Appealing presentation, teamwork, knowing preferences, accessible snacks, mealtime assistance, pleasant atmosphere, resident involvement, celebration.

- Only 9.8% completed their main meal.
- With an average meal size of 248g, the median intake of residents was 157g.

This is well below the recommended intake for older adults, making it difficult to meet their macronutrient and micronutrient requirements. These alarming statistics reflect the need of positive mealtime experience to encourage adequate dietary intake.

WHY DOES THE MEALTIME EXPERIENCE MATTER?

Negative mealtime experiences often result in inadequate intake of food, which can increase risks of:

- Weight loss
- Malnutrition
- Falls and fractures
- Poor health
- Slowed wound healing and recovery from illnesses
- Reduced quality of life

BACKGROUND

The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission defines mealtime/dining experience to include a combination of 3 aspects:

- The food and drinks provided
- The service, and
- The atmosphere

A recent study (Sossen et al., 2020) of Australian aged care residents reported that:



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Positive and enjoyable mealtime experiences can help to:

- Encourage nutritional intake
- Encourage social interaction
- Reduce risks of unintentional weight loss, malnutrition and falls
- Enhance overall wellbeing and quality of life

STRATEGIES TO CREATE A POSITIVE MEALTIME EXPERIENCE

The Food and Drink

- Ensure that foods and drink are well presented - "looks good and tastes good".
- Ensure that food is served at the correct temperature - cold food cold and hot food hot.
- Use food moulding, piping and layering to enhance the presentation of texture modified meals. Texture modified foods resemble the look of the regular textured foods as close as possible.

The Service

- Create a team approach. Chefs, food service staff, care staff and allied health can work together to deliver a positive mealtime experience.

- Get to know the residents and their preferences.
- Make snacks and drinks accessible throughout the day.
- Give residents adequate time to eat, drink and socialise. Residents with chewing difficulties or certain conditions will require extra time to eat.
- Provide mealtime assistance if needed.
- Collect feedback from residents and staff on a regular basis.

The Atmosphere

- Build a pleasant mealtime environment by considering aspects of table layouts (table clothes, cutlery, napkins), lighting, decorations, ventilation, music and background noise etc. Involve the residents in these discussions to more closely meet their preferences.
- Involve the residents in menu tastings and recipe sharing.
- Celebrate special occasions, events, birthdays and festivals.