

TOTAL foodservice

THE DINING EXPERIENCE

FOR CARE HOMES

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Mealtimes are an integral part of everyday life in care homes and a good dining experience can have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of residents.

Not only a time for nourishment but mealtimes offer residents the opportunity to form social connections and food often evokes feelings of comfort.

For many of us, the way food is presented and served and the environment in which we eat all affects the enjoyment of a meal.

We've developed a range of tips and advice to support you in creating a positive dining experience.



BEING PERSON-CENTRIC



Having a person-centric approach at mealtimes means putting the needs, preferences and overall wellbeing of residents first.

- **Offer choice and flexibility where you can.**
- **Take note of individual dietary requirements and personal preferences.**
- **Regularly communicate with residents to understand if anything has changed.**

Record residents' meal choices and quantities eaten to help identify eating habits and trends.

At mealtimes, carers should be focused on the residents to help when needed. Aim to reduce external visits during dining times as this may distract from eating.

It's also key that all staff are communicating with each other to ensure the residents' needs can be met.

THE DINING AMBIENCE

While good quality, nutritious food is a fundamental part of care home dining, the environment in which you eat also plays a key role.

- **Create a calm dining ambience, in which the room has been set up in advance.**
- **Bright lighting or natural daylight is recommended to improve visibility.**
- **Ensure the environment isn't too loud or distracting.**

Focusing on plate presentation so dishes look appealing can help in encouraging people to eat. Serve fresh and vibrant coloured food to increase appetites that tend to diminish as we age. Try not to stack the food on the plate as this can be off putting.

Those with texture modified diets should still be able to enjoy meals that look appetising and recognisable.





Image: Adept Care Homes

SETTING THE SCENE

Consider laying the table 20 minutes before service to create a dining room feel.

An important part of a person-centric dining experience is creating a homely environment for residents, so the dining room feels comforting and inviting.

A well-presented table with carefully considered serve ware to increase independence and reduce spills all help to improve the experience.

Tableware such as placemats and coasters not only give the setting a familiar feel that highlight the time for a meal, but specific coloured items can be used to notify carers of individual requirements without the need to ask residents.

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PLANNING
Make sure to plan ahead of mealtimes so the needs of all residents are understood before dining.

NOTES
Carers should take comprehensive notes for chefs. For example, if a resident doesn't like a certain food, state what they dislike about it.

PROTECTED MEALTIMES
Make mealtimes free from as many interruptions as possible as it can be difficult to get a resident back to eating once distracted. Carers should focus on the residents at mealtimes and help when needed.

LIGHTING
Ensure the room is well-lit, allowing everyone to function more independently.

PLATE PRESENTATION
Use vibrant colours within dishes so meals look enticing. Don't pile food high as it can seem overwhelming to residents. Consider separating foods so every item is clear to see.

SEPARATE DRINKS
Set up a separate hydration station with drinks and offer them little and often.

REDUCE NOISE
Playing quiet background music during dining times can evoke feelings of nostalgia. Otherwise, try to keep noise to a minimum as not to distress residents.

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THE TABLE
A well-dressed room improves the dining experience. Good quality table linen and small vases of flowers both contribute to the overall ambience.

PLATES
Avoid white plates on white tablecloths that may be hard to see. Instead use a plate with a vibrant ring and lip to improve visibility.

PERSONAL ITEMS
Some residents like to bring their own placemat or napkin rings for a sense of comfort.

CUTLERY
Cutlery should be good quality and rounded for residents with reduced dexterity.

COASTERS
Using coloured coasters can be a subtle way of indicating needs of residents to carers without the need to ask.

CONTRAST COLOURS
Use contrasting colours of certain table items such as salt & pepper so they are more easily visible.

DRINKSWARE
Use clear tumblers rather than coloured beakers so the liquid inside can be seen.

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Track residents' fluids intake across the day to prevent risk of dehydration.

CONSIDERATIONS

It's important to also consider how the dining format is set up for those wishing to eat in their rooms.

If a resident is dining in their room, ensure that the experience is just as thought through as in the dining room. The tray should be of good quality, a doily could sit under the plate and a small vase of flowers can make it feel special. Continue to offer what you would at the dining table, such as a napkin and condiments.

Mealtimes are also a great opportunity to invite family members. If residents are celebrating an occasion such as a birthday or anniversary, make the experience special for them and it will mean a lot.

RESOURCES

We've partnered with OHK who provide online dysphagia & IDDSI framework training to care home employees.

Speak to your account manager for more information about discounted training.

OHK
SPECIALIST PARTNER FOR DYSPHAGIA MANAGEMENT

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