

BEST PRACTICE DINING / MEAL SERVICE TECHNIQUES

Social factors

Evaluate social factors that may detract from the person's eating experience.

- ◆ Is the eating environment comfortable, quiet, calm?
- ◆ Does the individual eat alone? Eating with company increases food intake.
- ◆ Does noise or other distractions interfere with mealtime?
- ◆ Is the visual appeal and temperature of the food optimal?
- ◆ Is food served when the person wants to eat?
- ◆ Are individuals served simultaneously when seated at the same table?

Individual

Facilitate increased food consumption

- ◆ Interview the individual and family members to determine food preferences
- ◆ Eliminate dietary restrictions (low salt, low sugar, low fat) that impact taste or palatability in consultation with the physician
- ◆ Try different food textures and offer foods that are easier to chew and swallow for people with chewing and swallowing problems
- ◆ Note individuals with poor meal intake, who are normally independent, and offer encouragement and assistance

Provide feeding assistance

- ◆ Offer finger foods to individuals who cannot use eating utensils
- ◆ Enlist occupational therapy to help individuals improve dexterity and control or provide adaptive devices
- ◆ Determine which persons are candidates for feeding assistance including
 - ❖ Verbal prompts
 - ❖ Physical guidance such as hand-over-hand feeding
 - ❖ Feeding individuals who cannot eat independently

Enhance the dining experience

- ◆ Provide a comfortable *home-like* atmosphere / environment
- ◆ Provide fluids while waiting for meal service / serve at least two beverages with meals
- ◆ Remove meals from trays and serve people seated together at the same time
- ◆ Serve food with adequate portions, correct textures, and at appropriate temperatures
- ◆ Present foods so that they appear and smell appealing (for example bake bread or cookies)
- ◆ Vary the menu choices so that they are not monotonous
- ◆ Ask the person for preference of dining companions
- ◆ Position individuals properly for eating and drinking (i.e. wheelchair arms are under the table) to promote independence, prevent aspiration, and minimize fatigue for frail individuals
- ◆ Provide prompt, personal, and cheerful assistance when needed
- ◆ Feed individuals who are dependent while seated at eye level
- ◆ Provide oral nutritional supplements between meals or after the meal is eaten
- ◆ Avoid medications and treatments in the dining room
- ◆ Provide administrative oversight during the meal
- ◆ Schedule staff lunch breaks before or after meal service

Family support

- ◆ Ask family members about the person's food preferences
- ◆ Encourage family presence at meals
- ◆ Ask family to assist the individual with meals as needed
- ◆ Request favorite foods brought from home

