

Culture change holiday meal tips

As the holidays approach, employees working in nursing facilities that have begun the culture change journey may have questions about meals, such as:

- How do we incorporate holiday meals into a person-directed care concept?
- Is it OK to have potluck meals with families bringing special dishes from their homes?
- Are there any regulatory guidelines that would prohibit potluck meals during the holidays?



The Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS) is dedicated to assisting nursing facility providers to transform the culture in their facilities by affirming the dignity and value of each resident and the caregivers who provide support for them. This includes serving comfort foods, especially during holiday meals.

The benefits of sharing meals

Sharing meals benefits residents in several ways. Mealtime is a wonderful opportunity for staff and residents to get better acquainted. Many studies have shown that people in nursing facilities will eat better when family or staff share a meal with them.

Research also indicates that if therapeutic diets are required, the person's food preferences should be included as much as possible. For the resident who is medically frail, preventing weight loss is more important than adherence to a therapeutic diet to treat a medical condition.

DADS encourages nursing facilities to make the dining experience comparable to eating at home. Resident satisfaction with the quality of the food and the dining experience should always be a nursing facility priority. Autonomy in relation to food – such as access to food between meals and having foods brought in by family and friends – has a positive association with quality of life for residents. The most important concept of person-directed care is: All decisions default to the person.

Because having a holiday potluck meal is usually a one-time event, if the concern is about following therapeutic diets, the recommendation would be that one meal "out of the ordinary" in the scheme of normal procedures generally is acceptable.

To learn more

- The [New Dining Practice Standards by the Pioneer Network Food & Dining Clinical Standards Task Force](#) are available free from the Pioneer Network's website. These standards are fully supported by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), the American Medical Directors Association (AMDA), and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND).
- When staff, families or friends offer to bring food from home, follow the guidance in the June 12, 2009, [CMS Survey and Certification Letter S&C-09-39](#). There is no conflict between the CMS guidance for a nursing facility as provided in S&C-09-39 and a holiday potluck meal, as long as each resident has the right to choose **not** to participate in the meal and the facility provides a comparable "facility prepared" meal.
- If you have additional questions, please send email to DADSCultureChange@dads.state.tx.us.