

The key to successful mealtimes

Know your client's history



- What is their culture or traditions in relation to food and mealtime?
- Do they prefer to eat alone or with a group?
- What time of day do they like to eat?
- Do they prefer large or small portions?
- How long do they take to eat?
- Do they prefer a quiet and calm table or lively conversations?
- Be flexible to accommodate client's changing needs.

Create the ideal mealtime environment

- The dining room can impact the client's ability to eat and drink
- Reduce distractions, noise and interruptions
- Use preferred lighting: usually bright and cheery
- Small dining room with few items on the tables (remove used and unneeded items)
- Soft music, or no music at all (depending on preferences)



Create the ideal mealtime environment



- Provide enough time to avoid rushing the client
- Respect their preference for how to dress for dinner
- Create an appealing table setting: Fiesta ware, flowers, candles, etc.
- Create color contrast between the food and the dishes when possible
- 'Mocktails' can stimulate appetite and socialization

Know your client - *behaviors* to watch for

- Worries or concerns
- Signs of contentment
- Willingness to eat
- Interacting and responding to others
- Preference for privacy
- Agitation and signs of anxiety



Know your client - *abilities* to watch for



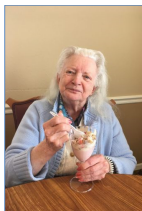
- How much food/fluid is consumed
- Ability to use utensils and dishware
- Food spills (motor coordination or impaired vision)
- Seating ability: balance and posture
- Coordination and strength
- Swallowing and chewing abilities (high risk for aspiration)
- Wearing glasses, hearing aids and/or dentures if needed

Know your client - *eating habits* to watch for

- How much and what kinds of foods are consumed each day
- What times is the person hungry
- Weight changes
- Appetite changes
- Difficulties with chewing or swallowing
- Level of physical activity



Make foods readily available



- The client may prefer not to eat at traditional mealtimes
- Make high-calorie, protein-rich foods available around the clock (such as a food cart or buffet style)
- Provide desired foods, even if they are not balanced meals (focus on quality of life)
- Finger foods may be more accessible for those who can't sit at the table or hold utensils

More tips for success

- Maintain a familiar, consistent routine
- Know and respect the client's preference and anticipate their needs
- Limit menu choices, and if possible have the choices made in advance
- The client is not trying to be difficult when problems arise: difficulties (i.e. chewing, inability to hold utensils) can take the pleasure out of eating



More tips for success



- Be patient and understanding, the client may refuse to eat because they are confused or embarrassed, and it's easier for them to withdraw
- Provide reassurance, reduce tension and help to maintain the person's dignity
- When possible, serve larger meals at lunchtime and lighter foods or finger foods in the evening

Promoting independent eating

- Demonstrate eating skills using verbal and visual cues
- Use a hand-over-hand method and allow them to take over if possible
- Provide one-step instructions, offer simple choices
- Remind client to chew and swallow
- If using utensils is difficult, provide finger foods



Promoting independent eating



- Provide assistance when possible, such as pre-opening milk cartons, unwrapping silverware, etc.
- Use adaptive eating tools when possible, such as plates with large rims, cups with lids and wide bases, utensils with large handles, etc.

The importance of successful mealtimes

- Food provides life-sustaining nourishment, contributes to good health, satisfies hunger, stimulates our senses and can be an important sharing and social time
- Many favorite experiences and memories involve meals, such as holiday dinners, birthday celebrations, etc.
- Identify and respect personal, cultural and religious food preferences



The importance of successful mealtimes



- Smell, tastes and textures of foods can stimulate memories and provide comfort. When possible, reminisce with clients about happy food/mealtime memories
- Mealtimes are opportunities to engage in familiar rituals that reinforce personal control: If possible allow clients to help prepare food, set the table, put dishes away, etc. - remember it's the process not the product - it doesn't matter if the tasks are not done perfectly