

## IMPROVEMENT GUIDE

## Quality Dining Experience & Meals

For many reasons it is healthy for Seniors to dine together. Studies show that seniors who dine together eat more, make better food choices, and are at lower risk for chronic disease and obesity. In addition, eating together minimizes loneliness and creates an environment to foster new friendships. Seniors who eat together generally report feeling happier.

### Improvement Recommendations

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1. Honoring residents' dignity and choice in dining is a component of person-centered care. Allowing residents to choose the time and place they want to eat is important, particularly for breakfast. If you are not doing this, consider how to accommodate residents who choose to eat when they are ready.
2. Offer restaurant-style dining options. Provide access to beverages and snacks throughout the day:
  - Tea, coffee, juices, etc.
  - Fresh fruits and nutritious appetizing snacks.
3. Create a home like atmosphere in the dining room:
  - Use items such as tablecloths, cloth napkins, proper tableware, etc. Set the tables in a welcoming manner.
  - Offer a fine dining atmosphere with good lighting, flowers, and music.
  - Aid and provide assistive equipment for eating and drinking for those who need it in a dignified manner.
  - Provide a space for residents to enjoy meals with guests.
  - Recognize holidays and special occasions with appropriate menus and decorations.
  - Recognize religious and cultural food traditions.
4. Set a standard for quality food and meal presentation. Use photos of the food to accompany the menu to show staff the expectation for meal garnishing and plate appearance.
  - Food should be fresh, colorful, and appetizing.
  - Present food beautifully on the plate.

- Residents order from menus allowing for choices of food.
  - Kitchen employees wear appropriate outfits such as chef hats, jackets, and black pants.
5. Address dietary restrictions:
- Appropriately season pureed foods and present them in an appetizing manner.
  - Prepare and present special dietary needs without drawing unwanted attention to the resident.
  - Accommodate religious dietary needs.
6. Residents participate in menu planning and preparation.
- Obtain input from resident council on foods and snacks they would like to be available.
  - Consider the unique culture of your community.
  - Have a process for residents to provide and update food preferences and requests.
  - Provide Ethnic or regional snacks.
7. Train staff on the customer service aspects of food and dining:
- How to set a dining table.
  - How to clean, handle, and maintain silverware.
  - Use matching China, glass, and flatware in good condition.
  - Communicate the menus and options for meal and dining services and snacks to all staff.
  - Make a menu calendar available to residents and families.
  - Allow religious, regional, and cultural preferences related to dining.
8. Make efforts to monitor and reduce disruptions in the dining room. Encourage staff to endeavor to make every meal the “best dining experience ever.” Direct observations of meal service may help to improve service delivery and quality of dining experience:
- Have staff sit with residents to monitor and help keep conversations going. This shows management considers this to be an important part of the day and helps to reinforce positive staff and resident behaviors.
  - The atmosphere in the dining room should be peaceful and not chaotic. Ensure the music is not too loud or distracting.
  - Residents have a choice in seating arrangement.
  - Accommodation is made for those in wheelchairs.
  - Watch for “clique” behavior. Have staff keep an eye out for residents who approach and leave a table without sitting down, eating quickly, or leaving without finishing a meal. Ask questions to uncover this behavior, residents may be reluctant to talk, and initiate conversations to solve it together.
  - Proper equipment (weighted coffee mugs, food guards, tremor canceling flatware etc.) and strategies can help reduce mess that might ruin meals for others nearby.
    - White plates make food more visible and accessible to sensory-impaired residents.
    - If clothing protectors are used, they are made to be attractive and not look like a bib.
    - Cut food into bite size pieces for those who need it.

- To calm disruptive diners, serve appetizers, let diners know how long until food is served etc. to make them more comfortable.
- Observe that positive interactions between staff and residents occur, choices of food and beverages are offered, and alternatives are presented in a timely manner.

## **Guided Discussion Topics**

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Conducting a guided discussion with a focus group or panel of employees, family members, and residents promotes collaboration, diverse viewpoints, problem-solving, engagement, clarity, alignment, and knowledge sharing—all of which contribute to the development of more effective and well-rounded action plans.

The questions below will assist in a guided discussion to help drill down to the root issues that may be impacting residents and family members based on the facility's most recent survey results. NRC Health recommends conducting guided discussions post survey on topics that the facility wishes to address for improvement.

### **TIMING OF MEALS**

1. How can staff and leadership involve residents in determining the timing of meals to better meet their needs and preferences?
2. What methods are currently used to gather resident feedback on mealtime preferences?
3. How can the staff ensure that residents are actively engaged in decision-making regarding mealtime schedules?

### **MEAL CHOICES**

4. What strategies can be implemented to include residents in selecting food choices and menu options?
5. How are residents currently involved in the menu planning process and how often menu options rotate?
6. How do staff encourage residents to provide ongoing input on food choices and menu options?

### **STAFF TRAINING**

7. How are food staff training and supported in proper cooking and service techniques that enhance the quality of the meals and overall appearance?
8. What training programs or resources are currently available for food staff in terms of culinary skills and service etiquette?
9. How does leadership review and critique food service staff and the overall dining experience?

### **MEAL ACCOMMODATIONS**

10. What steps can be taken to improve the understanding and accommodation of resident dietary restrictions?
11. How are resident dietary restrictions currently documented and communicated to the dining staff?

12. How do staff make accommodations for restrictions and preferences that go outside of standard options offered by the community?

### **DINING ATMOSPHERE**

13. How can a welcoming and comfortable dining environment be created for residents?
14. Are there possibilities for incorporating entertainment or social activities during mealtimes?
15. What strategies can be implemented to foster a sense of community and socialization during mealtimes?

### **MENU DESIGN**

16. In what ways are residents actively engaged in taste-testing and providing feedback on new dishes or recipes?
17. Are there opportunities for residents to participate in taste-testing sessions for potential menu additions?
18. How do the staff regularly seek feedback from residents regarding new menu additions and their success in their addition?

### **STAFF COLLABORATION**

19. What strategies can be implemented to improve the communication and collaboration between the kitchen and dining staff regarding meal preparation and service?
20. How is the current workflow and timing between the kitchen and dining staff organized to facilitate timely meal delivery?
21. How are concerns regarding timely meal delivery and food temperature communicated to the kitchen and dining staff?

## REFERENCES

Dining culture in Long-term care Homes: Transitioning to Resident Centered and Relational Meals  
2015

<https://www.hmpgloballearningnetwork.com/site/altc/articles/dining-culture-change-long-term-care-homes-transitioning-resident-centered-and-relational>

Best practices for Food Services in Senior Care Facilities

<https://www.verywellhealth.com/resident-centered-food-services-197752>

Pioneer Network – Dining Practice Resources <https://www.pioneernetwork.net/resource-categories/dining/>