

# Food Service in Dementia Care

## Learner Workbook



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## **INTRODUCTION**

In this course we will discuss three main key components regarding food service in dementia care. It is our job as care providers to monitor our residents and make sure he/she is eating and drinking properly. Residents with dementia have a higher risk of malnutrition and dehydration. We will address steps you can take to encourage good nutrition among your residents with dementia. Also it is necessary to report to your supervisor when a resident is not eating or drinking well.

How many times have you been invited to join a friend for lunch or a coffee date? The meal time is a social affair for our residents as it is for each of us. It is also an important time for the residents to meet his or her nutritional needs.

In this course we will address four factors to keep in mind during the resident's meal time. These include:

- Environment
- Safety
- Providing Full Assistance
- Behaviors/Refusal

Let's take a look at the above factors in more detail.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

No one is inspired to enjoy a meal in an environment that is cold and uncomfortable. This is why it is essential for us to set an environment for the resident that is warm, comfortable, and inviting. You want to create a place where the resident will want to be and will encourage him or her to complete the meal.

Factors to consider regarding the meal environment include:

- Noise
- Lighting
- Table setting
- Table mates

- Serving food
- General comfort

Another aspect to think about regarding the environment is to be prepared. Make sure the environment of the meal area is organized and put together before the resident's meal time. Keep things simple. Use contrasting colors. For example; yellow dish on a red table cloth.

Your attitude also sets the tone of the environment. You should have a positive attitude and encourage the residents about meal time. Techniques you may want to use include:

- Talk about the food with positive descriptions ("That steak looks delicious and juicy, Mrs. Jones, and smells inviting.")
- Mention to the resident what time of meal he or she will be having ("Are you ready for your yummy pancake breakfast, Mr. Smith?")

Other environmental considerations include; noise, glare, table mates, serving food, and clutter.

## **NOISE**

Various noises around the meal area can cause distractions and irritation to the resident. Avoid clanking dishes and loud conversations. Some residents may enjoy soft background music, but remember, it should always be the resident's choice. Monitor residents during his/her meal. If music is playing in the background and you observe residents becoming distracted or irritated you may want to discontinue the music.

## **GLARE**

No one is comfortable when the sun is glaring into his or her face. Make sure the sun is not shining on the residents while he or she is eating.

## **TABLE MATES**

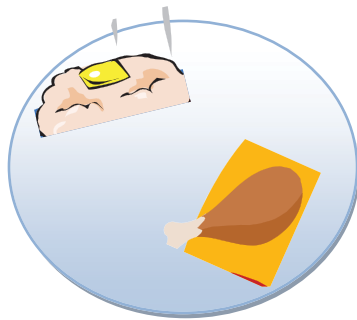
Most of us prefer to enjoy a meal with other people with similar interests and so do our residents. When you assist a resident to a table for his or her meal, keep in mind the other people around the table. Seat the resident near other residents or staff whom he or she has companionship with or has similar interests.

## SERVING FOOD

Residents have a higher risk of becoming overwhelmed or confused if he or she is served too many items. Limit the amount of various items served at once. You may prefer to serve the resident one item at a time. You also may want to assist the resident by using the clock method to distinguish what each item is at what location.

For example:

“Mr. Smith, your chicken is at five o’clock, and your mashed potatoes are at eleven o’clock.”



Although a resident has dementia, he/she is still capable of determining appealing or non-appealing food. You want to create a plate of food that is attractive and desirable for the resident to enjoy.

## CLUTTER

Avoid having too many distracting items at the table. Having various items on the table, for instance; flowers, salt and pepper shakers, sugar, etc. can become a distraction to the resident. You also want to be cautious as some residents with dementia may try to grab the decorations on the table and may harm himself or herself.

## SAFETY

One of our highest priorities as care providers is safety. Our goal is to do all we possibly can to insure our residents will have a safe and enjoyable experience.

Let's take a look at the four safety concerns regarding our residents and meal time.

- Temperature
- Table Decorations
- Knives and Other Sharps
- Aspiration and Choking

## **TEMPERATURE**

Persons with dementia may have a difficult time determining an appropriate temperature depending on the severity of his/her disease. It is your responsibility as the care provider to make sure the temperature is prepared and served at the correct temperature. Our residents with dementia may not realize if the food is too hot or too cold, so it is up to you to keep him or her safe.

## **TABLE DECORATIONS**

Making sure the table decorations are safe is also an essential part of our role in providing quality care for our residents. Persons with severe stages of dementia may attempt to put inappropriate objects into his or her mouth. For instance, he or she may attempt to eat the petals from the flowers on the center of the table. This can be very dangerous and even deadly.

Ask your supervisor what is appropriate to have on the dinner table during the resident's meal times.

## **KNIVES AND OTHER SHARP OBJECTS**

To ensure safety to our residents, avoid placing knives and other sharp objects in front of the resident with moderate to severe dementia. Be sure to speak with your supervisor regarding your Community's policies regarding the use of knives and other similar utensils.

## **CHOKING AND ASPIRATIONS**

Aspiration refers to when a resident inhales small bits of food or liquid into the lungs. When a person has a level of cognitive impairment, he/she is at a higher risk for choking or aspirations during a meal. Monitor your resident for any signs or symptoms of choking or aspirating. These signs may include:

- Clutching his or her neck

- Excessive coughing
- Difficulty breathing

Always refer to your first aid training and Community policies regarding appropriate prevention and interventions for choking and aspirating.

## **ASSISTANCE**

Persons with dementia may require assistance during meal time. Always encourage as much independence as safely possible. Not every resident will need the same amount of assistance, but we do want to encourage residents to maintain as much capability of independence at a level that is safe for him or her.

Strategies to encourage independence:

- Use the correct and sometimes modified utensils
- Cueing and modeling
- Finger foods
- Cut food in advance

If a resident requires full assistance with feeding, you will want to consider the following:

- Do not rush the resident (Go at the resident's pace)
- Offer small bites
- Watch for pocketing (When the resident holds small bits of food between the cheek and gum)
- Be sure to have enough staff
- Seat residents together with other residents who require full assistance (This allows one staff member to safely and appropriately feed more than one resident at a time.)

## BEHAVIORS

What if a resident refuses to eat?

Sometimes resident will simply refuse to eat. Some reasons being he or she is not hungry at the time of the meal. Some residents with dementia may not remember how to eat. Do not stress if the resident is not hungry during the scheduled meal time. You should encourage the resident to eat when he/she is ready, even if this may be during another engaged activity. Always make sure the food is maintained safely.

Can the resident eat later?

Patience is the key when working with residents with dementia. Be flexible! If the resident refuses to eat at the moment you have prepared the food, you should safely wrap the food up and save it when the resident is ready to eat at a later time.

Your approach is essential in the resident's success. Have a positive attitude and show enjoyment about the meal that is being prepared and served. Talk with the resident about the goodness of the food using positive descriptive language. Orient the resident to what he or she will be eating.

Also, you will want to offer choices that the resident will enjoy. Not everyone will prefer the exact same types of foods. Be sure to offer foods your residents would choose and enjoy eating. He/she still must have a personal choice! Always put the resident first and provide a safe and comfortable meal for the resident to have.

Ask your supervisor if you have any questions regarding your Community's policies and procedures. We wish you much success and enjoyable meal times with your residents.

On the following pages are discussion exercises you can use to enhance your understanding of training in the area of food service for dementia care. Take some time to address these questions among the class. Be sure to follow your state regulations and Community's policies.



## DISCUSSION EXERCISES

What might discourage a resident from eating his or her meal?

- A. Poor appetite due to medications they take
- B. Awful odors in our dining room (such as incontinent odors)
- C. He/She does not like what is served
- D. We have him/her sitting at a table where tablemates are not compatible

Write your response below:





# DISCUSSION EXERCISES

**If a resident does not like what is served, what can you do?**

**Write your response below:**



## DISCUSSION EXERCISES

**If a resident is not eating, what do we do?**

- A. Let our supervisor know**
- B. Document per facility policy**
- C. Keep an eye on the resident's weight. Report weight gain or loss to the physician per facility policy.**

**Write your response below:**



## DISCUSSION EXERCISES

What might you notice about a resident who is dehydrated?

- A. Sunken eyes
- B. Dry mouth
- C. Dry eyes
- D. Less active
- E. Less urine output

Write your response below:



## DISCUSSION EXERCISES

**If a resident does not like water, are there alternatives?**

- A. Popsicle**
- B. Melons**
- C. Juice**
- D. Broth**
- E. Non-caffeinated soda**

**(Note: caffeine pulls fluid out so we would not want beverages like coffee)**

**Write your response below:**