



A fact sheet for providers



Getting the dining experience right in aged care

This fact sheet outlines how providers can create an enjoyable dining experience for residents in aged care to support their consumption of meals, reduce risks of malnutrition and dehydration, and to meet the Aged Care Quality Standards.

The dining experience is a combination of the food and drinks provided, the service and the atmosphere. This experience impacts on a resident's quality of life and wellbeing.

Why it matters

Residents who enjoy their dining experience are more likely to eat and drink well, reducing the risk of malnutrition, dehydration and unplanned weight loss.

An enjoyable dining experience is important for residents regardless of what, where, how and when they eat.



How it's done

✓ Support a collaborative team approach to the dining experience

Cooks, chefs, food service, care staff and allied health working together with the resident will ensure a positive dining experience.

✓ Encourage staff (including kitchen, service and care staff) to get to know each resident and their preferences

This includes where and when they eat, who they dine with, what and how much they eat.

✓ Provide flexible dining options to match resident preferences

This may include buffets, self-service, plating meals in the dining room so residents can see and smell the food, menu ordering and extended mealtimes.

✓ Provide easy access to snacks any time of the day

This helps promote and support residents' ability to choose when they eat.

✓ Consider the design of the dining room

Residents are more likely to eat and drink in a dining room that is pleasant and homely. This can be achieved by considering the appropriate colour choices, furnishings, decorations, table coverings and settings. Layout, lighting, ventilation, glare, background noise and providing contrast are also important factors to consider.

✓ Focus on the dining experience

Making mealtimes about food, drink and socialising, rather than clinical tasks or providing medication (unless it needs to be taken with food), encourages residents to enjoy their dining experience.





✓ Maximise staff available during mealtimes

This ensures staff have the capacity to sit and engage with residents during mealtimes for both conversation and support. This also allows staff to gather informal feedback on meals and preferences. Remember to ensure you have enough suitable seating for staff.

✓ Facilitate connections between residents and chefs, cooks and kitchen staff

Encouraging these staff members to be in the dining room during mealtimes allows residents to provide feedback on meals and menu suggestions.

✓ Encourage all staff to dine with residents, including cooks, chefs, care staff, management, board members, clinical and allied health staff

When residents and staff sit down to share the same meal, this helps to foster connection and engagement. It also creates a positive work culture and enhances engagement, commitment and work satisfaction for chefs, cooks and kitchen staff.

Getting the dining experience right ensures providers meet the Aged Care Quality Standards



Standard 1: Consumer dignity and choice

"I am treated with dignity and respect, and can maintain my identity. I can make informed choices about my care and services, and live the life I choose."



Standard 2: Ongoing assessment and planning with consumers

"I am a partner in ongoing assessment and planning that helps me get the care and services I need for my health and wellbeing."



Standard 4: Service and Support for Daily Living

"I get the services and supports for daily living that are important for my health and wellbeing and that enable me to do the things I want to do."





✓ **Ensure each resident has access to modifications where needed**

Modified tables, cutlery and aids support residents' independence and dignity. Occupational Therapists and Speech Pathologists can advise on how best to meet residents' needs.

✓ **Involve residents in the planning and assessment of their dining experience**

This can be achieved through resident suggestions and feedback mechanisms, resident food committees, recipe sharing, menu tastings and other informal and formal feedback opportunities.

✓ **Review organisational systems and processes**

Appropriate processes and systems are fundamental to getting the dining experience right. Provide dining experience training to all staff, including care staff, cooks, chefs and kitchen staff. Ensure that chefs and cooks are trained in aged care meals and beverages. Ideally, at least one cook or chef on staff will be qualified in aged care food.

✓ **Consider meal flavour and presentation**

Establishing processes to ensure meals arrive from the kitchen looking, smelling and tasting appetising will encourage meal consumption. Serve meals that are enjoyable, have texture and are served at an appropriate temperature. This is easier to achieve if food is prepared onsite. However, if you outsource catering, it is important to check that individual needs, preferences and choices are catered for.

✓ **As a provider, regularly ask yourself whether you would want to eat at your service**

More information

For more tips, refer to the [Dining in residential aged care – tips, tricks and what to avoid fact sheet](#).

Phone the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission's Food, Nutrition and Dining Hotline on **1800 844 044** (free call), 9am – 5pm AEDT, Monday to Friday if you wish to speak with professionals about issues, ideas or concerns in relation to an enjoyable food, nutrition and dining experience in an aged care service. Alternatively, you can contact the Commission's general enquiries line on **1800 951 822** (free call).

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