



A fact sheet for aged care staff



Getting the dining experience right in aged care

This fact sheet outlines how residential aged care staff, including cooks, chefs, food service staff and care staff, can create an enjoyable dining experience to support residents to take pleasure in, and consume, their meals.

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.

Getting the dining experience right includes understanding residents' preferences, supporting choice, creating mealtimes that respect consumer dignity and choice, and involving each resident in the planning of their dining experience.

All aged care staff have a role to play in creating and delivering an enjoyable dining experience and a positive environment for both residents and staff.



Why it matters

An enjoyable dining experience:

- brings pleasure to a resident's day and enhances their wellbeing and quality of life
- is important for residents regardless of what, where, how and when they eat
- increases the chances of a resident eating their meals
- encourages social interaction and engagement with other residents and staff.

If the dining experience is unpleasant, or does not meet residents' preferences, they will be less likely to eat and drink, which can lead to reduced quality of life, weight loss, malnutrition, frailty, increased risk and falls and poor health.



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."



How it's done

✓ Create a team approach

This ensures that cooks, chefs, food services staff, care staff and allied health work together with the resident to deliver an enjoyable dining experience.

✓ Get to know each resident and their preferences

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

✓ Remember that preferences change over time and from day to day

Regularly check in with each resident about their preferences. For example, a resident may want to dine on their own – in the dining room or in their own room – one day and socialise with others in the dining room the next.

✓ Provide flexible dining options so you can meet resident preferences

This may include buffets, self-service (where appropriate), plating meals in the dining room so residents can see and smell the food, menu ordering, and extended mealtimes so residents have flexibility around the time they eat and what they eat.

✓ Provide easy access to snacks and drinks at any time of the day

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





✓ **Create a pleasant dining environment**

Residents are more likely to eat and drink in a pleasant and homely dining room. This can be achieved by considering aspects of the dining room, including table layouts, lighting, decorations, table coverings and settings. Ventilation, glare, background noise and providing contrast are also important factors to consider. Cooks, chefs, service staff and care staff can all be involved in these discussions with residents to ensure the dining room meets their preferences.

✓ **Ensure all meals look appetising, regardless of texture**

Residents are more likely to consume their meals if they look appealing. All food and drinks should be well-presented, regardless of texture. Provide meals that are enjoyable and are served at an appropriate temperature.

✓ **Focus on the dining experience**

Making mealtimes about food, drink and socialising, and avoiding clinical tasks and medication (unless it needs to be taken with food), will encourage residents to enjoy their dining experience.

✓ **Support independence and dignity**

Empower residents to eat and drink using modified tables, cutlery and aids, if required. Provide mealtime assistance only if needed or requested.

✓ **Ensure residents have adequate time to eat, drink and socialise**

Some residents may need several small meals a day to meet nutritional needs if they cannot eat much during each meal. Also remember to ensure food is not removed before checking if the person has finished.



✓ **Sit down with residents during mealtimes**

Staff, including cooks, chefs, food service and care staff as well as management, boards and clinical staff can sit down and engage with residents during mealtimes. Having conversations and making eye contact is a great way for residents and staff to form connections. This also allows staff to gather informal feedback on residents' meals and preferences.

✓ **Chefs and cooks can connect with residents to create enjoyable dining experiences**

Encourage ongoing conversations with cooks, chefs and residents about their preferences and whether they are enjoying their meals.

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

This can be achieved through resident suggestions and feedback mechanisms, starting and maintaining a collaborative resident food committee, recipe sharing, menu tastings and other informal and formal feedback opportunities.

✓ **Celebrate special occasions and events**

Encourage social interaction between residents by celebrating birthdays, festivals and holidays. Also consider hosting theme nights and takeaway nights.

✓ **Ask yourselves 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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 **Phone**
1800 951 822

 **Web**
agedcarequality.gov.au

 **Write**
Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
GPO Box 9819, in your capital city