

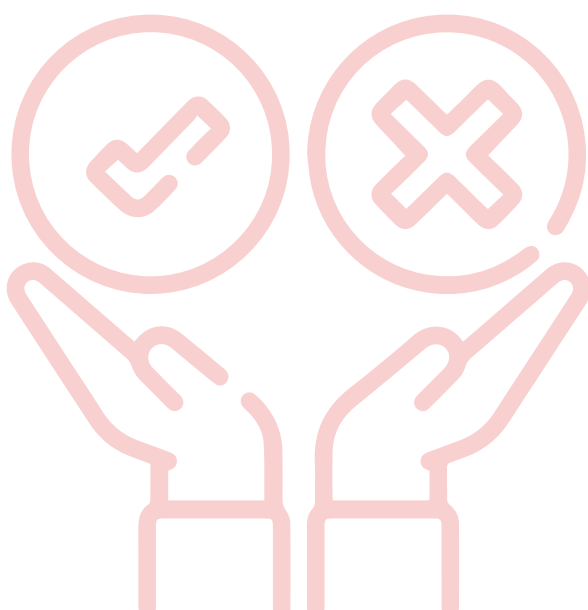


## A fact sheet for aged care staff



# Supporting informed choice about food and drink in aged care

This fact sheet provides an overview for residential aged care staff (including chefs, cooks, food service and care staff) on the requirements and importance of residents' rights to making choices about their food, drink and dining experience.



**Choice is a human right and this right does not change as people age or move into residential aged care.**

### Why choice matters

Supporting older people to make informed choices about all aspects of food, drink and the dining experience is a key part of maintaining their quality of life in residential aged care.



Supporting residents to make choices is important for the following reasons:



### It's the right thing to do

Informed choice gives residents dignity, respect, helps maintain their identity and self-esteem and enhances their quality of life.



### It's the smart thing to do

Residents who have informed choice are more likely to eat and drink well. This helps to prevent unplanned weight loss and malnutrition, reduces the risk of illness and injury, improves quality of life and increases satisfaction with their aged care experience.



### It's the law

Aged care providers and their staff are required to provide informed choice to residents and respect those choices.

The **benefits of providing choice** are that residents are more likely to eat and drink, maintain their weight, have a higher quality of life and increased satisfaction with their aged care.

The **risks of limiting choice** may mean residents are less likely to eat and drink. This can cause weight loss, malnutrition, reduced quality of life and dissatisfaction with care.

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



### Standard 1: Consumer dignity and choice

#### Consumer outcome

*"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."*

#### Organisation statement

The organisation:

- 1 (2) (a)** has a culture of inclusion and respect for consumers; and
- 1 (2) (b)** supports consumers to exercise choice and independence; and
- 1 (2) (c)** respects consumers' privacy.





## How it's done

### ✓ **Get to know each resident**

All staff should know each resident's preferences including what, where and when they like to eat, their cultural preferences and their long-term eating habits.

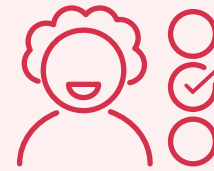
### ✓ **Discuss residents' preferences regularly with them**

Staff can ask each resident what they prefer and review this information regularly with the resident as their preferences may change.

Document these discussions and decisions made so these preferences can be shared with other relevant care staff.

For residents with dementia or cognitive impairment:

- ask simple questions or ask with photos of food and drinks
- ask family and friends about their known dislikes and likes
- notice and record what they appear to enjoy or dislike, what they eat willingly or refuse
- ask what food on the plate they want to eat while you are assisting them.



### **Resident choice about all aspects of their food, drink, meals and dining includes:**

- ✓ where they sit
- ✓ who they sit with
- ✓ when they eat
- ✓ where they eat
- ✓ what food they eat
- ✓ what cutlery they use
- ✓ cultural options
- ✓ how much they eat and drink
- ✓ whether they use clothes protectors.

Choices must be within reason – reasonably practical for the provider to deliver.





## ✓ Give residents information and time to make their decision

Residents should be provided with all the information they need to make an informed choice. Provide adequate time for residents to consider their options, as well as opportunities for them to change their mind.

## ✓ Involve residents in the menu and dining experience design

This could be through a resident food committee, food tastings, encouraging residents to share recipes and/or co-designing menus with chefs.

## ✓ Ask about residents' preferences at meal times

Don't assume preferences remain the same each day. You should check in regularly.

## ✓ Engage allied health professionals to recommend appropriate meals and nutrition support for each resident

This may include a dietitian, speech pathologist, physiotherapist, occupational therapist or dental practitioner. Recommendations made by allied health practitioners may need to be reviewed regularly by those practitioners. Provide each resident with the recommendations and the reasoning behind them so the resident can make an informed decision. Remember that regardless of the recommendations, it is still up to the resident to make their final informed choice about what they do.

## ✓ Document and communicate

Document the choices and preferences of residents and communicate these to other relevant care staff.



### Providing more choice at mealtimes includes:

- ✓ buffet meals with screens to maintain food hygiene (staff can serve food to residents)
- ✓ restaurant style 'menu ordering'
- ✓ extended mealtime so that residents can choose when they eat and how long they take
- ✓ easy to understand menu items so residents know what their options are
- ✓ picture menus and photos of food to support residents with cognitive impairment to make choices.





## What about 'risky' choices and the dignity of risk?

- Some residents may choose to accept the risk of consuming foods and drinks that have been identified as a risk. Making these choices, such as eating sugar, salt, butter, second helpings, 'fast food', food cooked by family or food of various consistencies, is an important part of a residents quality of life.
- Some residents may choose to accept the risk of coughing or choking so that they can eat the type of food and drink that they want.
- If a resident makes a choice that is possibly harmful to them, or others, you can:
  - ✓ ensure the resident understands the nature and severity of the risk
  - ✓ provide suggestions about how the risk could be managed or reduced
  - ✓ work with the resident to identify ways to support them to live the life they choose
  - ✓ help the resident make a choice that does not place others at risk.
- If a resident has been given all the information and time they need to make an informed choice – in a way they can easily understand – the choice to accept the risk is up to them.
- It is important to remember that residents given food or drink they do not want or like are at risk of not eating or drinking enough.

Ensure you give each resident all the available options and information, document conversations, support the residents' decision, and communicate this to other staff, including the care staff, food service staff, and chefs and cooks.

For more information on dignity of risk, refer to the fact sheet: Informed choice and supported decision making for people who plan to Eat and Drink with Acknowledged Risk (EDAR) at [www.agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/quality-care-resources/food-dining-and-nutrition-resources-providers](http://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/quality-care-resources/food-dining-and-nutrition-resources-providers).



### **Standard 1: Consumer dignity and choice**

*3(d) Each consumer is supported to take risks to enable them to live the best life that they can*

Dignity of risk supports a consumer's independence and self-determination to make their own choices, including to take some risks in life. If consumer choices are possibly harmful to them, organisations are expected to help the consumer understand the risk and how it could be managed to help them live the way they choose.

Organisations have other responsibilities under law to manage risks to the health and safety of the workforce and others in the service environment. In meeting these obligations the organisation is expected to show how they involve consumers and look for solutions that are the least restrictive of their choice and independence.



## More information

### Choice posters

Additional fact sheets on choice are available at [www.agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/quality-care-resources/food-dining-and-nutrition-resources-providers](http://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/quality-care-resources/food-dining-and-nutrition-resources-providers):

- Providing food and dining choice
- Food and drink in aged care - supporting informed choice and risk.

### Swallowing fact sheets

Additional fact sheets on swallowing are available at [www.agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/quality-care-resources/food-dining-and-nutrition-resources-providers](http://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/quality-care-resources/food-dining-and-nutrition-resources-providers):

- Supporting safe and enjoyable mealtimes for people with swallowing difficulties
- Nutrition and texture modified food and drinks
- Informed choice and supported decision making for people who plan to Eat and Drink with Acknowledged Risk (EDAR).



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**Write**

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