

My home life

Promoting quality in care homes for older people Issue 18



FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD!

How to make the most of mealtimes in care homes.

INSIDE:

What's a 'social' mealtime? • Creating an enjoyable experience • Let's talk about food!

Dear Friends,

Mealtimes are a big part of everyone's day and food is a subject we all love to talk about! Eating and drinking well is an important part of keeping us all healthy and happy. The way we offer food, how and where it is served and the choices that are given make a real difference. Sometimes the smallest things have the biggest impact.

In this bulletin we've captured lots of ideas from care homes around the UK to share with you.

Best wishes and bon appétit!

*The Teams at
My Home Life*



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My Home Life is a UK-wide initiative that promotes quality of life and delivers positive change in care homes for older people. We work with care homes, statutory bodies, community organisations and others to co-create new ways of working to better meet the needs of older people, their relatives and staff. Our vision is a world where care homes

are great places to live, die, visit and work; where care homes are:

- Supported to deliver to their potential
- Valued and trusted by those who work with them
- Cherished by their local communities

WHAT'S A 'SOCIAL' MEALTIME?

When we think about how and where we enjoy meals our answers will be varied. Most of us will have memories of family mealtimes or eating out with friends. Sometimes we will enjoy a meal in front of the TV or an intimate meal with someone we love. We may have memories of food we have eaten in other countries. Food and mealtimes provide great opportunities for reminiscence.



A social mealtime is one that offers opportunities to enjoy food and company. Care homes that do this well take time to get it right for the residents by taking into account their needs and preferences and residents can choose where to sit and who they sit with. Research has shown that homes that encourage staff to eat with residents have better outcomes in terms of nutrition, hydration and relationship centred care.

Taking time to observe the residents' mealtime experience can give you much food for thought.

"The manager invited a carer to observe mealtimes and make notes of what she could see/hear/feel/smell. The results were discussed at a meeting with staff and then with residents and relatives. Using the magic wand tool, the manager asked: 'If you had a magic wand – what would you like mealtimes to be like?' A number of developments were implemented including opening a second dining room, reducing noise and providing more choices at mealtimes." (Care home manager, MHL Scotland)

Making food fun

Care homes have been inspired by television programmes like 'The Great British Bake Off' and 'Masterchef'. A care home manager told us:

'We began by asking residents, relatives and staff to share their favourite family recipes. Everyone got involved so we used the momentum to run a food competition like Masterchef with all the residents as judges!'

Community Engagement



Another care home manager told us that they approached their local supermarket to see if they could work together. The representative from the supermarket now visits regularly to do food demonstrations called 'Food from around the world'.

Afternoon Tea



Afternoon tea was turned into an extended activity by one care home:

'We take our residents strawberry picking, then we do cake-decorating and cream-whipping! - all for a lovely afternoon tea that we enjoy together.'



CREATING AN ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE

Starting in the lounge and moving to the dining area.

The mealtime experience can begin before food is served. Think about how you prepare residents for meals. Are they involved in mealtime preparation or in a position to smell the aromas of food cooking? How can your home provide opportunities for sensory experience? Are there enough clues that a meal is going to be served? Do staff encourage residents to come to the dining area with curiosity and rumbling tummies? Can residents choose not to eat in the dining room?



How enticing is your dining environment?

Good lighting

- Is the dining area well lit?
- Is the area without shadows or glare that might cause distress?

Signage and sounds

- Are there signs to the dining area that are clear and visible for residents and visitors?
- Is background noise and activity in the dining room helping to encourage happy mealtimes - just as in any home?
- If there is music, is it chosen by the residents?
- Do residents prefer a buzz of activity during mealtimes or a quite calm environment?

Choice

Do your residents have choice about where to sit and who to sit with?

If you know your residents well you will know who they 'click' with. A resident might want to sit alone or within a group of people.

Do you use pictures or show the food on offer to present the meal choice in an understandable way?

Do you provide other opportunities for residents to eat outside of set mealtimes?

Do you have small bowls of food or fresh fruit in living areas to stimulate appetite?

Real choice might mean adapting your mealtimes. A Commissioner commented:

"One home now offers a breakfast buffet and carvery main meal: the choice has increased and so have the residents' appetites!"



Encourage conversation

Do you gather ideas for meals across the care home community?

Bring together your activities coordinator and chef to think about activities like food preparation in the kitchen or living areas.

Cutlery, crockery and condiments

Have you tried different sized cutlery and changing the colour of crockery to enable residents to see their meals afresh?

Do you have condiments in view on the table to give a homely feel and promote choice?

Do residents have the option of pouring their own gravy? This may be important to some people.



For a social mealtime try different shapes and sizes of tables, laid up for two, for a group or with space for a visitor to join.



Offering individual support

Each resident will have his/her own preferences and needs during mealtimes. A person with dementia may give you the answer they have just heard if given multiple food choices because of memory impairment. As a person's dementia progresses, the world needs to come closer to them.

Are you mindful of food and drink being in reach?

Do you use gentle reminders to take a bite or a sip?

Swallowing food may become very difficult for residents in late stage dementia. It might be worthwhile to check their oral health in case they are experiencing any pain in the mouth. Hengoed

Park Care Home, Swansea, told us of a situation where they were concerned about a resident who had stopped eating. The deputy manager told us:

“The staff couldn't understand why (resident) wasn't eating - it was very unlike her. She usually loved her food but because of her dementia she couldn't tell us verbally what was wrong. We had to do a full health check and then we found the cause: she had a mouth ulcer under her denture.”

Any time can be a mealtime especially for someone living with dementia. One member of night staff told us: “I help residents to eat at night if they are hungry. We have one resident who likes beans on toast before he goes to bed at 11pm. It is part of his routine and this is his home!”

Pureed food doesn't have to be boring!

This is a pureed Christmas dinner made tempting by Leighton Short, chef at Baglan Lodge Care Home in Port Talbot, South Wales



Did you know?

Some people with dementia experience quite dramatic changes in how things taste for them. Trying out different flavours (even things they didn't like before) can have surprising results! Some care homes try serving dessert first for people who taste sweet things better, as it gets their appetite up in time for the main course. It's really important that changing tastes and preferences are reflected in care planning and reviewed frequently.

LET'S TALK ABOUT FOOD!

How about setting up groups of interested residents, relatives and staff to talk about mealtimes? In our experience, people are usually very happy to talk about food:

- What's working well in mealtimes?
- What could make your mealtime experience even better?

One manager told us: "I spent a whole day speaking to residents about food. This led us to changing the breakfasts, having lighter meals at lunchtime and a larger meal in the evening. Now residents are less likely to fall asleep in the afternoon and they feel better going to bed at night with a full stomach. They are also not waking up ravenous - and nobody has lost weight! The new approach has also saved us money."

Natural food smells can be great for encourage appetite – what about a coffee machine or toaster in the dining room?



Eating Together

Do staff eat with the people they care for? If not, is there a reason why? Some care home staff say they feel guilty about having their lunch 'on the job'. Missing meals is not good for anyone including staff. We need to consider the wellbeing of everyone in our care homes.



Thinking about drinking

Making sure someone is drinking enough not only helps their mobility and skin health and prevents headaches, UTIs and tiredness - it can also potentially prevent confusion and delirium.

Sometimes it's not enough to have a jug of water out on a table. Make sure a glass is within reach and use gentle encouragement to drink. Do the people living in your care home have a preferred glass or mug? Have you tried using coloured glasses? It might make a real difference to residents' enjoyment of their drinks. Sitting with someone while you both enjoy a drink can make a difference too.

Food with a high water content should also be encouraged: watermelon, cucumber, summer berries and grapes, for example. Why not involve residents in making fresh fruit ice lollies?



TOP TIPS

from care home managers

1. **Encourage involvement in food preparation:** Offer residents the opportunity to take part in food preparation and laying the tables. Ask residents, relatives and staff for favourite recipes.
2. **Feed the soul:** Familiar tastes and smells awaken pleasant memories, improve appetite, and create a feeling of belonging.
3. **Create the right ambience:** Is the dining room too busy? Too quiet? Too noisy? How does it feel for residents, families and staff?
4. **Offer choice:** Think about how you can open up a conversation with residents about their preferred foods and also, where this feels appropriate, how they would like to protect their clothing during mealtimes.
5. **Consider different approaches** that might help your individual residents to eat independently. Using adaptive cutlery or coloured crockery and glasses can sometimes make a big difference.
6. **Make food fun!** Think about different options for meals. Why not ask people to construct their own pizza toppings; get fish and chips delivered and celebrate people's birthdays with their favourite food and drink.
7. **Mealtimes as special occasions¹:** Think creatively about what you can do to bring residents together with their friends and families over a special meal.
8. **Give individualised support:** Know your residents! Some will really appreciate your extra attention and support to eat and drink.
9. **Make the environment work:** Making small changes to the arrangement of the dining area can have a big impact on enjoyment of food and social interaction.
10. **Enjoy the experience:** The mealtime experience should be a time of enjoyment, conversation and sharing stories for all of us, staff included. Go with the flow!



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