

Assisting with Meals

Guide to Serving Meals

- ▶ Provides a balanced diet. Most of the food intake is carbohydrates with some fat but it is important to include protein and fiber each day because they cannot be stored in the body. Sufficient liquids are also important. Check with staff to determine that your loved ones is on a specific diet.
- ▶ Before meal time, it is important to see that the room is orderly with urinals and bedpan out of the person's sight if dining in their own room. Sanitize the eating space before serving person their meal. Also in dining area ensure the room is appealing.
- ▶ Your loved one should have the opportunity to use the toilet, commode or urinal and to wash his/her hands before each meal. Provide mouth gargle if the person cannot get out of bed.
- ▶ Wash your hands before serving meals.
- ▶ Take a real interest in helping them enjoy their meal. Be patient and always be mindful of their dignity.
- ▶ Offer a clothes protector or napkin.
- ▶ Know about special difficulties that they may have. For instance, difficulties in chewing and swallowing.
- ▶ Sit your loved one in a comfortable position in bed or sitting up well supported in a chair before you bring in the food.
- ▶ Place the food in such the way so that they can reach everything conveniently and safely.
- ▶ Help them to cut up food if they need help.
- ▶ Warn them if you are offering something hot.
- ▶ Encourage them to finish the meal but do not force them.
- ▶ Observe your loved one during the meal, i.e. any difficulty in swallowing or any change in general condition.
- ▶ After meal, help them to wipe their mouth and attend to their oral hygiene.
- ▶ Advise them to remain in sitting position for at least half an hour to prevent gastric reflux .

Overcoming Physical Disabilities

If the person has weak grip as in arthritis sufferers, elderly or disabled people, eating and drinking can make mealtimes very tiring. Make use of special cutlery and dishes to overcome these problems.

A light cup or a glass with an angled straw is easier for some to drink from. A deep bowl and light, thick-handled cutlery are best for someone with a weak grip.

It is important for the person's dignity and self-respect that he/she is able to eat independently; even if someone requires assistance ensure you are giving them options. If the person tires and is not able to finish their meal on their own they may need assistance to complete their meal. Allow the person to complete what they can but do not assume that they are finished when they are not able to proceed further because of tiring.

How to Encourage Eating

- ▶ Find out what the person is happy to eat and ask if there is anything he really dislikes. Check whether there are any foods which the person must not eat, either for reasons of belief or because of special medical instructions or allergies. Do not mix foods together.

- ▶ Take time with presentation of meals so that the food appears appetizing. When providing the meal on a tray, see that everything needed is attractively laid out on a clean tray. Do not overfill containers of drink or soup or they will slop.
- ▶ Provide variety in the meals to stimulate poor appetite.
- ▶ Small helping of appetizing food served at shorter intervals are more appealing than large occasional meals.
- ▶ Keep the person's mouth and tongue moist and clean at all times. Provides him with mouth gargle to freshen his breathe before eating.
- ▶ If the person is wearing dentures, check that they are well fitted and that there is no food caught under it. If so, remove the dentures and rinse them and rinse the resident's mouth before replacing them. This will make eating more comfortable and enjoyable.
- ▶ Use straw or ask staff for a feeder cup to serve drinks if mouth and tongue are sore.

Guide to Assisting a Person with Meals

- ▶ Make sure the person is sitting in a safe, comfortable, upright position before beginning the meal. Use pillows, one-way cushions etc to prevent person from sliding during their meal.
- ▶ Protect the person with a napkin or clothes protector and the bedclothes with towels if necessary.
- ▶ Always sit by the person's side and within easy reach. It is important that you are sat at the unaffected side of the person, for instance stroke patient, so that he/she can easily participate in the process.
- ▶ Try to keep the food warm. If the meal is taking a long time, put small amounts of food on extra plate and keep the rest covered until needed.
- ▶ If the person has difficulty in swallowing, cut food into very small pieces. Offer small mouthfuls by using a dessert spoon or fork and frequent sips of water or other liquids. Allow the person time to chew properly and swallow before offering the next mouthful.
- ▶ Stop if the person is coughing continuously or appears breathless. These are signs of food entering the respiratory system.
- ▶ If the person drools or food runs out of one side of his mouth, as in the case of stroke, turning his head slightly to the unaffected side may help.
- ▶ Wipe the person mouth and chin as necessary.
- ▶ Remember to give the person your undivided attention throughout the meal.