

Food activities within residential aged care

Activities involving food can help ensure that our residents are still able to enjoy the social, sensory and nutritious benefits that food oriented programs can bring to their wellbeing.

Food frames our world: cultural celebrations, intimate dinners, family feasts, snacks with other activities, spiritual and seasonal celebrations. Food activities are especially beneficial for people living with dementia, those that are feeling depressed or unwell, or experiencing loss of appetite. Sensory food activities can enhance pleasures and stimulation for those now on puree diets. Consider these ideas and tailor them to suit your unique client groups:

1) Dementia: Hydration is essential but can be overlooked when people do not have the ability to communicate that they are thirsty, or for those with thickened fluid needs. Lack of fluid can cause great discomfort, such as strong headaches, eyes becoming sensitive to light, skin change, sleeplessness and anxiety. Fluid based activities such as a **Garden Drinks Party:** sampling thickened juices, ice cream and yoghurt, can tantalise the taste buds, increase fluid intake and enhance physical wellbeing.



Plastic champagne flutes with ribbons tied at the base, bright coloured cakes cases and serviettes. Use bright colours for visual appeal. Select a few different thickened fluid flavours for each person and place in flutes and cake cases. Find a quiet place in the shade and bring three or four residents to your garden party. Use long handled spoons to assist with feeds and allow your group to enjoy at least three contrasting flavours, eg mango, vanilla, cranberry, orange, grape, Nudie Juice blends, or prune etc.

Fresh air, hydration, close to nature and social connection - this simple activity has longer lasting positive benefits for your group. Remember risk assessments first regarding drinks, thickness, allergies, dietary and ingredient requirements for each participant.

2) Enhancing appetite ready for meals: inactivity, certain medications, sensory loss, depression, anxiety and dementia can lead to a loss of appetite in our residents. A brief lead-up to meals “focus” can assist with enhancing appetite and preparedness for everyone to eat. Try our “4 A’s” approach: **Activity – Aroma – Assist – Ambience**

a) Activity – lead a short group exercise program to energise the body and stimulate the mind. Hold a 5-minute group discussion about food and cooking. Using recipe photographs, describe the delicious, mouth-watering foods that are about to be served. Encourage deep breathing exercises, ensuring that everyone is awake and alert.

b) Aroma – tantalise the senses with food aromas such as a citrus room fragrance, fragrant herbs to smell, vanilla perfume on a handkerchief to smell, appropriate essential oil in burner.

c) Assist - be ready to assist with cutting up residents’ food, assisting with feeds and hydration. Encourage independence with eating as much as possible and prompt/assist before food becomes cold and less appealing. Do not force feed: this creates negative eating experiences for people.

d) Ambience – play soft, background instrumental music that is soothing and even-paced. This can counteract rushed eating and possibly reduce incidence of choking, wandering away from tables, becoming agitated or impatient. Try harp music, Baroque, calm classical, new age soothing music and no vocals (some may try to sing along while eating).