

Dignity in Care factsheet

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Eating and nutritional care in practice

- Carry out routine nutritional screening when admitting people to hospital or residential care. Record the dietary needs and preferences of individuals and any assistance they need at mealtimes and ensure staff act on this.
- Refer the person for professional assessment if screening raises particular concerns.
- Make food look appetising. Not all food for people with swallowing difficulties needs to be puréed. Keep different foods separate to enhance the quality of the eating experience.
- Make sure food is available and accessible between mealtimes.
- Give people time to eat; they should not be rushed.
- Provide assistance discreetly to people who have difficulty eating. Use serviettes, not bibs, to protect clothing.
- While socialising during mealtimes should be encouraged, offer privacy to those who have difficulties with eating, if they wish.
- Ensure that mealtimes are sufficiently staffed to provide assistance to those who need it. If there are insufficient staff, introduce a system of staggered mealtimes.
- Encourage carers, family and friends to visit and offer support at mealtimes.

Hydration

- Encourage people to drink regularly throughout the day. The Food Standards Agency recommends a daily intake of six to eight glasses of water or other fluids.
- Provide education, training and information about the benefits of good hydration to staff, carers and people who use services.
- Ensure there is access to clean drinking water 24 hours a day.
- If people are reluctant to drink water, think of other ways of increasing their fluid intake, for example with alternative drinks and foods that have a higher fluid content, (eg breakfast cereals with milk, soup, and fruit and vegetables).
- If people show reluctance to drink because they are worried about incontinence, reassure them that help will be provided with going to the toilet. It may help some people to avoid drinking before bedtime.
- Be aware of urine colour as an indication of hydration level (Water UK, 2005); odourless, pale urine indicates good hydration. Dark, strong-smelling urine could be an indicator of poor hydration – but there may be other causes that should be investigated.

Ideas you could use

Ask people how their mealtimes could be improved

Ask the people who use your service for their ideas about improving mealtimes – and put their suggestions into practice.

Recruit volunteers to improve mealtimes

Create a pool of volunteers to help make mealtimes more sociable and assist people with eating where needed.

To find out more, visit SCIE's Dignity in care guide at www.scie.org.uk