



Living in a Care Home

Food & mealtimes

Food preparation and the rituals of eating are important elements of cultural identity. Involving residents in planning and preparation and helping residents to enjoy their food wherever possible is a sign of a home that takes the concept of holistic care seriously – caring for the whole person rather than a collection of ailments and illnesses.

Food is, of course, essential to physical wellbeing and enabling residents to eat well is an important part of the job of care staff. Residents should have access to three meals a day and drinks and snacks in between. Thought should be given to the timing of meals with care taken to avoid big gaps particularly between supper and breakfast. If the evening meal is quite early then what is offered for supper would have to be quite substantial to take the resident comfortably through to breakfast. And it is important that residents are offered snacks and drinks. Staff should not rely on residents to ask as shyness, confusion or not wanting to bother staff may leave residents hungry or thirsty.

A helping hand

Staff should help residents to eat. They should not feed residents. The difference may be difficult to judge but it is an important one. Sitting next to the resident, maintaining eye contact, talking to the resident and going at their pace are all indications that the carer is helping rather than feeding. Carers should never be helping more than one resident at a time. Nor should they be talking to a co-worker or watching TV while they are doing it.

Going alone

After perhaps years of living alone or with a partner, getting used to communal eating may be difficult. It is common for residents to withdraw to their rooms and take all their meals there. Staff may try to

persuade your relative to join their fellow residents in the dining room. Although it is good to encourage residents out of their isolation, and try to address any reasons why residents may be reluctant to eat with others, ultimately the wishes of the resident must be respected. Residents must not be forced or coerced into changing their behaviour.

Private space

Eating with other people may become something of an endurance test and source of anxiety that could lead some people to withdraw from being with others as the only way of maintaining their dignity. When residents exercise their choice to stay in their room, for meals they have previously taken in the dining room with other residents, it may be worth thinking about what has caused this. It may have been an embarrassing episode – difficulty in eating, a row with another resident or member of staff, or failure to get to the toilet in time – that has caused a change in behaviour.

Remember

- A resident's likes and dislikes should be recorded in their care plan and reviewed regularly.
- Food should be attractive, even if is liquidised.
- Discuss any problems your relative is having with eating with their key worker, the cook or the home manager
- If food is prepared or served in an unusual way ask why such steps are necessary and how the decision was reached.
- When helping a resident to eat, staff should sit, maintain eye contact and go at the resident's pace.
- Drink should never be withheld from a resident in response to incontinence. It is likely to make matters worse.