

Mealtimes and Dining Experience in Aged Care

Position

Food and mealtimes are important, particularly for consumers of aged care services. Dietitians Australia calls for a national policy for nutrition care in residential aged care, including standards for meals and the mealtime environment, and assistance with eating and drinking.

Aged Care providers should engage Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs) in the assessment of the mealtime and dining experience using Dietitians Australia's 'Menu and Mealtime Quality Assessment for Residential Aged Care'.

Recommendations

1. Australian Government should urgently develop and implement a national policy for nutrition care in residential aged care, which includes standards for meals and the mealtime environment, and assistance with eating and drinking (see Dietitians Australia position on Malnutrition in Aged Care).
2. Department of Health and the Aged Care Quality & Safety Commission are to encourage residential aged care providers to engage an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) to assess the mealtime & dining experience using the Dietitian Australia Menu and Mealtime Quality Assessment for Residential Aged Care.

Background

Autonomy and control over the environment is a priority for consumers within the aged care sector. Whilst decision making is perceived to reduce for consumers living in institutional settings, food and mealtimes provide an opportunity for consumers to maintain personal control.¹ The mealtime environment has been described as a focal point for the broader experience of consumers in residential care. It is a feature of emotional and psychological connections with residents and helps to maintain familiarity and routine.² Key aspects within the mealtime environment are the physical environment and delivery of mealtime support. A communal dining room and adequate mealtime assistance are essential to maximise nutritional intake in this setting.

Recent Australian research has identified that only 9.8% of aged care residents on a regular or easy chew diet completed their main meal. Of the serve size of 248g, a median of 157g of the meals was consumed.³ Every mouthful counts to avoid unintentional loss of weight, and evidence shows that the mealtime environment has an important role to play. Person-centred dining environments support the mealtime experience of consumers receiving aged care services.⁴ Enabling consumers to choose their meal at the point of service leads to higher food intakes, and conversely, decreased food waste.

References

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