

# Mealtimes

## Benefits of an Enjoyable Mealtime Experience



Mealtimes in LTC are about more than food—they bring people together for important cultural and social interactions, impacting mental health and well-being. COVID-19 has presented many challenges for mealtimes in LTC. The following tips can help to create a positive mealtime experience even when dining in isolation, on-tray service in the resident's room, and with physical distancing restrictions.



## Mealtime Preparations



- **Environmental Scan:** Conduct a scan of the resident's space to ensure adequate lighting (e.g., meals late in the day may require turning on the light and closing curtains to minimize reflective glare from the windows), and limit other audio and visual distractions (e.g., loud radio or television).
- **Resident Positioning:** Support the resident to sit in an upright position, ideally in a chair with feet flat on the floor or on footrests facing a direction of preference. Ensure the resident has access to items they need for independent eating and drinking.

## Providing Mealtime Assistance



- Introduce yourself and provide clear communication about how you can/will assist the resident with their meal:

*"Hello (Resident Name), I'm (Staff/Volunteer/Family Name).  
I'm going to help you have your lunch today. Is it okay if we start with your juice?"*

- Sit with the resident and be a friendly and supportive presence.
- Orient the resident to their plate, cup, utensils and napkin.
- Show/tell the resident where and what food items are on their plate. Understand the resident's preferences (e.g. food likes/dislikes, routines, temperatures).
- Offer encouragement and reminders without rushing the resident.

- Pay attention to non-verbal cues from the resident that suggest they are tired, full, uncomfortable or not enjoying a particular flavour or temperature (e.g. not opening their mouth, pushing food away). Consider pausing/ stopping or offering something else.

## Supporting Mealtime Engagement



Isolating in their room can affect the resident's mood and result in less physical activity, which in turn can affect appetite and fluid intake.

- Have family or friends call the resident before a meal - talk about what they are having for their next meal.
- Discuss the meal choices with residents to stimulate interest in upcoming meals.
- During the meal, speak with the resident about how good the food looks and smells, and engage them in remembering meals they have had and enjoyed:

*"Your pie looks delicious. Have you ever made an apple pie?"*

- Learn about the resident and what is meaningful to them—share something you know they would like to hear about and consider engaging with items of importance to the resident (e.g. photography, stuffed animals).
- Consider if the resident would benefit from listening to music or watching television while they eat their meal.

## Creative Mealtime Ideas



- Consider using a meal tray card or placemat with interactive designs or games to generate discussion and stimulation.
- Seat the resident in the doorway of their room to see hallway activity.
- Create fun events for residents that are food focused (e.g. ice cream delivery cart to individual resident rooms, hallway distanced Bingo with a snack).
- Offer food prizes for participation in activities and programs.
- Have family or friends video call the resident to 'share' a meal.

