Feeding Techniques for Adult Day Care Participants

The effects of disabilities and aging can make mealtime frustrating for many adult day care participants. Here are some tips to make mealtime more pleasurable and help participants with feeding skills so they can eat the amount of food needed to maintain proper weight and good health.

Create a Pleasant Dining Atmosphere

- Use light, solid colors in the dining room to make the room inviting.
- Use soft lighting without glare or shadows.
- Use bright, solid colors for place mats, napkins, and dishes because they are easier to see.
- To create a homelike setting, use a simple centerpiece and plates rather than trays.
- Avoid clutter and keep the noise to a minimum.
- Maintain a comfortable room temperature.

Maintain Proper Positioning

Correct positioning is the key to maximizing eating independence, and it is essential for participants with swallowing difficulties or impaired motor control.

- A standard dining chair with arm rests that slide under the table provides the best eating position.
- If a participant uses a wheelchair, adjust the elevation of the table to allow the wheelchair arm supports to roll under the table.
- Lock wheelchairs into position at meals.
- Participants should be sitting up straight with the head upright and tilted slightly forward.
- Feet should be planted squarely on the floor or on foot supports if needed.
- Ask a rehabilitation therapist to suggest support aids for participants with poor seating balance or neck control.

Provide Special Foods and Eating Aids

- Have a Registered Dietitian (RD) and rehabilitation therapist observe the participants while eating.
- Provide any special diets the RD recommends, such as consistency-modified diets.
  - When appropriate, involve the participant and caregivers in choosing a food texture that is acceptable to the participant.
  - Provide any eating aids the rehabilitation therapist recommends, such as a nose cut-out cup or a weighted plate.
Use the Team Approach to Identify and Solve Mealtime Problems

• At mealtimes, have day care staff sit with participants who struggle to eat.
• Have the staff offer verbal, physical, and emotional support to participants to increase food intake.

By working together, you will improve the quality of care provided and the quality of life for participant.

Verbal Cues

Some participants may need verbal cueing to identify the steps in the eating process, such as picking up a utensil or scooping the food.

When giving verbal cues
• address the participant by his/her name and title, such as “Mrs. Lyons.”
• speak in a calm, soothing voice and use words appropriate for adults.
• maintain eye contact while speaking.
• use brief, simple directions.
• talk the participant through each step and repeat all the directions at each mealtime.
• offer choices by asking yes/no questions or other two-choice questions.
• redirect or restate the cue if the participant does not understand what to do.
• be patient and do not expect immediate results.
• give praise freely.

Physical Cues

Some participants can self-feed, but need help to keep their hands steady or to hold a utensil.
• If a participant cannot hold a utensil, place your hand over the participant's hand to provide support through all the eating steps.
• If a participant can hold a utensil, provide support at the wrist or elbow.
• Use verbal cues at the same time as physical cues to reinforce the eating steps.

Do not provide more assistance than is needed. The goal is to gradually decrease the physical support while the participant is increasing strength and improving eating skills, thus enabling greater independence.

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