

Improving nutrition for the elderly

Sadly, many of us have seen articles in the media highlighting the issue of older people becoming malnourished and left to starve in hospital as a result of being offered inappropriate food choices, not being given adequate assistance at mealtimes, or a lack of monitoring and assessment. Here in the Department of Medicine for the Elderly we have been using a number of initiatives to ensure that this is not the situation and to try and make malnutrition a thing of the past ...

Protected mealtimes

- a period of time over lunch when all non essential activities on the ward stop and staff focus on the meal service
- this reduces the number of interruptions at meal times
- more staff can help serve meals and help patients to eat
- problems can be identified and assistance given
- food intake recorded accurately which helps with future care

Nutrition assistants

- assist and encourage patients who need help eating and drinking making sure they receive the correct diet, equipment to maintain independence, assistance and supplements that they need
- maintain all the nutrition and fluid charts, weight charts and outline a risk assessment and care plan
- protect patient dignity, support protected mealtimes and make sure patients can choose what they want to eat
- are often able to build up a good rapport with the patients whom they care for and the patients seem to really appreciate the time and help the assistants give to them



Nutrition information display

- produced to raise the profile and awareness amongst patients, relatives and carers of the importance of good nutrition for the elderly
- includes statistics about malnutrition, information on what makes a healthy diet – types and quantities of food
- diet information for diabetics
- ideas for meals and snacks
- leaflets to take away outlining practical information
- information about meals on the wards – timings, what to do if a meal is missed, or what food is available for patients outside mealtimes from the ward kitchens
- a nutrition folder also gives staff information on Trust standards, best practice, recent research

Photo menu

- helps patients choose what they want to eat
- is a photographic record on a daily basis of the meal choices available
- benefits the very hard of hearing or deaf
- helps patients to actually choose food that they like rather than struggling to understand the nurses spoken word or read the menu
- patients with dementia can sometimes relate to the pictures better than the spoken word
- seeing the food can influence what they would really like to eat – beef may sound good but the chicken looks better!

