Tip #8: Please Pass the Hot Sauce

Food preferences develop over our lifetime—what, where and when we eat, as well as those “must haves” for special occasions. Family traditions and personal choices influence the satisfaction we get from a meal or even a holiday. That family stuffing recipe that just has to be part of the Thanksgiving meal is just one example of how food often satisfies us both emotionally and physically.

Meals and snacks are often the highlights of our day. Make the most of these moments by learning what matters to each resident. Discover and honor choices to increase satisfaction and comfort, and you will most likely benefit care partners as well. When dining is a positive experience, residents will stay hydrated, avoid depression and maintain a healthy weight.

Dining is always about more than nutrition. Emotional and social connections with food can become even more important in a new home. Caregivers are challenged to promote independence, choice and socialization with each dining experience. Consistent staffing is essential to good nutrition and hydration during meals, because those familiar with a person’s eating patterns may notice subtle changes in appetite and behaviors that reveal a change in health status.

If unable to help make a favorite recipe, the person can taste-test or supervise. Help individuals create those special dishes and table settings that matter most to them. If accommodation is needed, adapt the preparation process so the person controls as much as possible.

Honor the dignity of the individual. If dining assistance is needed, sit with the person and have a plate of food in front of you to make him or her feel you are sharing the meal, and that he or she is among friends.

Action Items

- Research and respect the resident’s dining history and preferred eating schedule.
- Practice assistive techniques with co-workers to increase empathy.
- Take advantage of great tools such as Dining with Friends™, a free webinar at http://www.httherapy.com/webinar-dining-friends-innovative-approach-dining-people-dementia/.
- Study a course on person-centered dining, available through National Nursing Home Quality Improvement Campaign.

For more information and training...

- About the National Nursing Home Quality Improvement Campaign Person-Centered Care Goal, go to https://www.nhqualitycampaign.org/goalDetail.aspx?g=PCC#.
- About person-centered care in Missouri, go to http://www.momc5.com/.
- About person-centered care across the country, visit the Pioneer Network’s website at http://www.pioneernetwork.net/Providers/Dining/TransformingDining/.

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