

HELPFUL IDEAS FOR

Mitigating Weight Loss

IN SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITIES

With the loss of congregate dining during the coronavirus pandemic, senior living communities are doing their best to maintain good nutrition for the people they are serving. The social isolation can affect how much residents consume and enjoy their meals. As a result, many communities are seeing weight loss and reduced intakes.

So, what are some things you can be doing to ensure those you serve are getting adequate nutrition?



FOOD FIRST APPROACH

- ▶ If you haven't already, consider liberalizing diets. Given the circumstances, diet restrictions should be reconsidered for therapeutic diets. You want residents to enjoy their meals as much as possible and ensure they are consuming the meals you work so hard to put in front of them.
- ▶ Sneak extra calories in by "fortifying" their foods. Can you do super cereals or higher calorie mashed potatoes by adding extra cream and butter?
- ▶ Take advantage of snacks. Who doesn't like a chocolate shake? You can prepare shakes with whole milk and for those adventurous folks, try a smoothie. You can also feature a "smoothie of the day" and try green smoothies to get those veggies in or any variety of fruit smoothies.
- ▶ Consider out-of-the-box approaches. Some communities have even used peanut butter cups to get extra calories and a little protein.
- ▶ If all else fails, look at options for commercially available supplements. Take into consideration how many ounces you think your residents will consume. Can you use an eight ounce product? Or, would a med pass be a better option to get condensed calories and protein? What is your available storage space? Can you use a frozen product or do you need to go with something shelf stable? And of course, what flavors would your residents prefer?
- ▶ Don't forget about hydration. The importance of fluids cannot be stated enough. Especially for those that need assistance getting to the bathroom. They don't want to be a

burden to staff and may decide that by drinking less, they can avoid asking for help. However, dehydration can exacerbate a nutritional decline and make residents feel even more lethargic. Keep pushing fluids!

MAKE MEALTIME FUN

- ▶ Eating in their rooms may decrease the enjoyment of residents when it comes to meals. Have staff think like restaurant servers and describe the "feature of the day" when delivering their meals. For example, try making comfort foods like roast beef and mashed potatoes sound enticing and delicious.
- ▶ Eating is a social activity for residents. Can you connect them virtually to loved ones by setting up a video chat for residents to share a meal with their family?
- ▶ If you have residents that need assistance feeding, can you use finger foods to help them with the ability to feed themselves? Get creative with delivering entrées and make them more user-friendly to those with challenged dexterity. Can you place food inside a hot dog bun or a tortilla? What about an ice cream cone for desserts?
- ▶ Do you have a way to play music? If you can, include music from their generation. It may remind them of happier times.



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