

## Food and Nutrition

Representing more than simple nourishment, food can be a powerful social symbol connecting people with moods, emotions and rituals associated with their identity, family and traditions. A person's relationship with food is highly intimate and individualised. Built over a life time, food habits can evoke feelings of comfort and familiarity and can be profoundly intrinsic to a sense of 'self'.

In considering the food and nutritional needs of consumers it is important to keep in mind that although food can be strongly associated with cultural expression and religious observance, the customs of people from similar cultural and/or religious backgrounds may vary considerably. Whilst some people may continue with the certain dietary styles such as vegan, kosher and halal, others may have adopted different preferences based on their experiences.

It is also important to recognise that individuals may not be accustomed to eating certain diets and may therefore experience different levels of tolerance for some foods. For example, a person who is used to eating rice as a staple part of every meal may not deal well with a diet high in wheat based products. The same can be said for diets high in dairy products.

Similarly the way food is served and utensils used can vary greatly. Some consumers may be accustomed to eating out of a bowl instead of a plate, or to using chopsticks or spoons instead of forks and knives. Some may even prefer or be accustomed to using their hands for eating.

Understanding and respecting consumers' individual and cultural nuances around food will ensure that they are able to maintain significant practices, a meaningful connection to the past, a healthy and joyful relationship to food, improving their prospects for maintaining nutritional sustenance.

### Key Considerations

- Conduct assessments and reviews of dietary needs in consumer's preferred language
- Consult a dietician or nutritionist for assistance in modifying the menu to incorporate culturally/religiously appropriate and nutritionally sound meals.
- Involve consumers in menu planning and food preparation (where appropriate).
- Ensure that staff responsible for food preparation are familiar with dietary preferences and culturally determined dietary restrictions of the consumer, and provide training as required.
- Ensure that staff responsible for assessment of dietary requirements have been trained in cultural awareness and appropriate communication.
- Be aware of any special rules/requirements/restrictions there are preparation methods for certain foods such as Halal or Kosher.
- Present menu choices in the preferred language of consumer.
- Offer meals served in a bowl instead of on a plate or different eating utensils such as chopsticks or a spoon instead of a knife and fork.
- Offer a bowl of water and a towel with meals for people who prefer to eat with their hands.

## Food and Nutrition (cont.)

- Provide a range of traditional condiments at meal times e.g. salt, pepper, tomato sauce, soy sauce, fish sauce, chilli, Tabasco sauce, olive oil, vinegar and salad dressings.
- Regularly include consumers' favourite meals in menu plans - ask consumers and/or family members for recipes and instructions on the correct way of preparing these dishes.
- Identify and celebrate special occasions with a culturally/religiously appropriate dish, and invite families, friends and community members.
- Obtain specific items and meals from external sources, where necessary.
- Plan regular outings to local restaurants for a meal or arrange for food to be delivered for residents on special occasions.
- Where possible invite consumers to cook a meal for themselves, with assistance relatives or volunteers from local cultural groups if required.

## Good practice story

### **Bolton Clarke's cultural food initiative**

Bolton Clarke's aged care home in Westmead, Sydney is serving the flavours of home to residents from more than 20 different cultural backgrounds. The on-demand initiative includes daily fresh cooked meals including at least one cultural dish, an on-demand menu of ten cultural appropriate meals pre-cooked and snap frozen on site. The menu was co-designed with residents from 23 cultural backgrounds to meet their cultural needs in relation to food and nutrition. Dishes on the menu reflect culturally appropriate recipes including chermoula fish with Moroccan beans, tandoori chicken with mint yoghurt dressing, nasi goreng and lamb osso buco.

The aged care home has also co-designed its food program with residents and families to implement a process to support safe food storage for families who want to bring in home cooked meals. Bolton Clarke is looking to expanding this initiative to other homes based on preferences of residents in each community.

# Practice guide

## Useful Resources

### SBS Food and Recipes

#### SBS Food

Recipes from over 30 different countries. Search recipes by cuisine: African, Asian-Pacific, Americas, European and Middle-Eastern.

LAST UPDATED: JANUARY 2022

### © Copyright and attribution

The Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing encourages the dissemination and exchange of information. All material presented in this document and on our website is provided under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Australia, with the exception of the Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing logo. Material obtained from this *Practice Guide* is to be attributed to the Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing.