

## 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 lifetime, 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 have varying tolerance to certain foods based on certain customs and also genetic factors. For example, lactose intolerance is most prevalent in people of East Asian backgrounds, due to the genetic component of reduced product of lactase, the enzyme that assists with breaking down lactose (found in dairy products).

Similarly, the way food is served and the utensils used at mealtimes can vary greatly. Some consumers may be accustomed to eating out of a bowl instead of a plate, or 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 and healthy and joyful relationship with food. Through consideration of a person's cultural connection to food, one can improve the prospect of maintaining optimal nutrition.

### Key Considerations

- Conduct assessments and reviews of dietary needs in consumer's preferred language.
- Conduct food focus groups with consumers and chefs.
- Conduct regular surveys for feedback from consumers.
- Consult a dietitian 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 considerations and 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 culturally appropriate communication.
- Be aware of applicable requirements for culturally or religiously specific food preparation and/or food sourcing such as Halal, Kosher, Jain Vegetarian.
- Present menu choices in the preferred language of consumer.

# Practice guide

- Consider culturally appropriate methods of meal presentation and dining methods, for example, preference for a bowl instead of a plate, or utilising chopsticks or hands instead of a knife and fork.
- Ensure consumers are adequately supported to engage with meals in ways that are in line with their culture, for example offering a bowl of water and a towel with meals for consumers who prefer to eat meals with their hands.
- Provide a range of traditional, culturally appropriate condiments at mealtimes, instead of just salt and pepper e.g. 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 dine at local restaurants, or arrange for culturally appropriate food to be delivered for residents on special occasions.
- Where possible, invite consumers to cook a meal for themselves, with the assistance of 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

### [Best Practice Food and Nutrition Manual for Aged Care Edition 2.2](#)

NSW Government

This comprehensive manual includes a chapter on Religious, Spiritual, Cultural and Linguistic Backgrounds of Residents

### [SBS Food and Recipes](#)

SBS Food

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

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