

Mealtime Assistance

Helpful Hints to Improve your Eating and Drinking While in Hospital

Nutrition, Hydration & Recovery

Adequate nutrition & hydration can help improve a person's recovery.

Poor nutrition makes you more prone to infections, reduces wound healing, increasing your risk of complications, length of hospital stay and quality of life.

Importance of Eating & Drinking Well

Being unwell can cause you to eat and drink less. Over time this can put you at risk of poor nutrition (malnutrition). A person's nutrition and hydration status can be affected by the following:

- poor appetite, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea or reflux
- changed taste or unable to feed yourself
- age, illness & disease

Optimising Your Eating & Drinking

Nutrition and hydration status can be improved by:

- ✓ Nutritional supplementation: may be recommended by a Dietitian.
- ✓ Food and fluid textures: your Speech Pathologist may be asked to assess different diet textures to suit your condition. Thickened fluids may be recommended.
- ✓ Signage above beds: helps inform family members, carers and staff about a person's food & fluid needs

How Family can Help

- ✓ Help with opening food containers/lids and placing meals within reach.
- ✓ If visiting at meal times – encourage the person to eat at meal times.
- ✓ Bring food that you know is enjoyed. Ensuring it complies with dietary requirements specified by staff.
- ✓ Ask Nursing staff for help if you think there are difficulties with chewing, swallowing or difficulty with utensils.
- ✓ If you notice the person is eating and drinking less than half their meals over a few days, please inform the hospital staff.
- ✓ For people having difficulty eating, be open to alternatives for nutrition support. Feeding via alternative methods is often the best way to help people recover from illness or surgery.



Strategies to Improve your Nutritional Intake

- If you get full quickly or feel too tired to finish a meal, eat six small meals a day.
- Don't rely on your appetite - instead eat or drink every 2 hours.
- Make every mouthful count. Choose foods/drinks that are nourishing such as 'Sustagen' 'Resource' or 'Ensure'.
- A Dietitian can assist you with your choices during your hospital stay and make suggestions for home as well.

Hospital Mealtimes

- Ask about mealtimes in your ward as mealtimes vary from ward to ward
- Generally,
 - Breakfast is served from 7am
 - Lunch from midday onwards &
 - Dinner from 5pm.
 - Midmeals and snacks are also served between meals if required
- Family and friends are welcome to assist their loved ones during meals.
- If you need assistance filling in your menu, please ask the Nutrition Assistants when they collect your menu card.

As well as nursing staff other health professionals can assist with your hospital meals, if needed:

- Dietitians: Assess your individual nutrition and fluid requirements and advise how best to meet these considering your medical diagnosis.
- Speech Pathologists: Assess and identify swallowing problems. They recommend the most appropriate textures of food and drinks to promote safety and comfort in swallowing and reduce risks of ill health.
- Physiotherapists: Assist with positioning for swallowing and improving the arms and hands range of motion and strength to improve independence.
- Occupational Therapists: Assist with identifying physical and other problems that reduce a person's ability to feed themselves. Strategies and aids (such as modified cutlery) are able to be recommended to increase independence. They can help family to assist at mealtimes by advising how best to set up and support the person to feed themselves.