

## Mental health and wellbeing

### Nutrition Support Action Plan (NSAP) for case managers/key workers - poor appetite

#### What can cause a poor appetite?

A poor appetite may be caused by several things, including low mood/depression, worry and stress. Medications may also lead to poor appetite. This does not mean consumers should stop their medication but will need to be extra careful to ensure they make good food choices.

#### Why is nutrition important for my consumer at this time?

Whilst your consumer may not feel hungry their body still needs nourishment. This is to keep their immune system strong and to prevent unintentional weight loss. We are also entitled to experience pleasure with eating.

#### What might I see?

You may notice your consumer is not eating much or they may tell you that they are not feeling well, but often you won't see this.

Other tell-tale signs of a poor appetite are:

- Unintentional weight loss
- Irregular eating patterns
- Tiredness
- Food stacking up or going off in the cupboard/fridge/freezer.

These signs may also indicate a lack of confidence or skills in shopping or cooking or a lack of cooking equipment (see relevant NSAPs for more ideas).

#### To assess consumer's nutritional status

Ask them the following questions and if they score a total of **2 or more** refer them to a dietitian (*circle the answers for each question & add for a total score*).

1. Have you lost weight recently without trying?	No	0
	Unsure	2
2. If yes, how much weight have you lost (kg)?	1-5kg	1
	6-10kg	2
	11-15kg	3
	>15kg	4
	Unsure	2
3. Have you been eating poorly because of a decreased appetite?	No	0
	Yes	1
Total Score: (if 2 or more refer to a dietitian)		

## **Actions for case manager/key worker**

- Your consumer may find small, frequent meals are better tolerated when compared with three larger meals. Encourage them to have something (small) to eat every two hours during the day.
- Eating “by the clock” may be necessary at the beginning, which can feel quite mechanical.
- Additional planning for the day might help, so try writing down each meal time or setting reminders on phones.
- There may be times of the day when your consumer feels more like eating. Get them to take advantage of this by encouraging them to eat well at these times.
- Encourage your consumer to treat themselves to their favourite foods, even if they are not traditionally consumed at a certain time of day (for example, porridge for dinner).
- Encourage your consumer to have a range of ready prepared foods and snacks on hand for times when they don't feel like preparing food. For example, soups, frozen or tinned foods, dried fruit, nuts, cheese & biscuits, yoghurts and custards.
- Encourage your consumer to cook larger quantities in advance and store in the freezer. Encourage good food hygiene.

- Fluids at meal times can tend to fill people up. If this is causing your consumer to eat smaller portions, recommend drinking fluids after and between meals.
- Recommend they avoid drinking low calorie drinks such as diet soft drink, tea, coffee and clear soups. Instead, recommend fluids that are high in energy and protein such as milk, milkshakes, Up&Go, Breaka, Sustagen or other commercial supplement drinks.
- Encourage your consumer to increase the energy content of fluids they drink by adding skim milk powder, yoghurt or ice cream.
- Encourage trying new foods as this may increase their interest in eating.
- Gentle physical activity can stimulate appetite. For example, taking a short walk around the block or even around the backyard. Encourage your consumer to do this, if possible.
- Encourage your consumer to enjoy meals as a social occasion – get them to eat with family and friends where possible and present food in an attractive manner.

## **Need more information?**

Refer your consumer to your health service's dietitian or an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD)

[www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au) ('Find a Dietitian').