

Standard Care Practices

Standard nutrition care refers to the minimum level of care that should be received by all patients, regardless of their nutritional status. Poor food intake predicts length of stay and affects the patient's overall hospital experience, which makes food intake monitoring of all patients critical to their well-being. Standard nutrition care practices address patients' positioning for eating, vision or dentition needs, concerns about pain or nausea, and ability to open food packages. In addition, tasty, appealing food that meets the nutritional needs of patients should be considered a standard of care. Food quality is important to recovery as well as patient quality of life and needs to be a high priority. In the context of illness, food is medicine, and medicine heals.

"There's so much more awareness and I guess involvement of the nurses [in nutrition]. So it's not just this tray is arriving for this person. Yes, it's the correct diet. Excellent, they're eating. Do they need help? It's a little bit more involved than that now. So they can look at a patient and identify a patient that's at risk and maybe even start to feel more comfortable taking actions before the dietitian comes in to see that patient. So I think very impactful."

- Nurse

The following are a variety of nutrition care strategies to promote food intake for all patients:

- **Increase awareness about the importance of nutrition**
 - Increasing awareness across departments about the importance of mealtimes, recognizing that everyone has a role to play in nutrition care ([Appendix 6](#)).
 - Encourage staff to decrease mealtime interruptions.
 - Encourage staff to assist the patient getting ready for the meal (e.g. a physical therapist finishing their treatment plan could support the patient by encouraging them to use the washroom before the meal).
 - Posters can be used to increase awareness about the patient's needs at mealtimes.
 - Brief education sessions about the importance of patient food intake can be held during huddles or a Lunch and Learn.
- **Provide positive encouragement to eat**
 - Staff can provide positive encouragement that eating is necessary for recovery.
 - During meal delivery, food service staff can encourage food intake by providing positive feedback about the meal.
 - If staff opinion regarding food is low, provide the opportunity for staff to taste the food, or provide more information about where it is sourced (i.e. locally) etc.

- Encourage family to bring in favourite, nutritious foods from home to stimulate appetite.
- Encourage family to visit at mealtime to inspire the patient to eat. They can bring their own meal so that they both benefit and enjoy each others company.
- ***Treat food as medicine***
 - Laminated posters that stimulate staff to ensure a patient's glasses, hearing aid, dentures, etc. are in place at mealtime, can be posted in patients' rooms. The posters can identify challenges that affect the patient's intake.
 - Unit fridges could be stocked with nutritious food and beverages. This extra supply allows food to be provided outside of mealtime, particularly at night.
 - Ensure that a process is in place for nursing staff to communicate, early in a patient's admission, to the food service department that a patient is unable to mark a selective menu.
 - Aim to have a meal delivered at a consistent time so that when family comes to help, the meal will arrive at the expected time and family is able to assist.
 - When a patient is not eating enough, allow and accommodate for family or friends to bring in food that will be eaten by the patient. Have a system for labelling and storing food brought into the hospital
 - Try to decrease the number of staff on break during patient mealtime to increase the number of people available to assist patients to get ready for their meal and when necessary, provide eating assistance.
 - Tray delivery for isolation patients is an issue in some hospitals. Try out some different strategies to ensure isolation patients receive a hot meal. For example, trays can be left at the nurses' station for distribution in a timely way.
- ***Involve volunteers***
 - Develop a volunteer mealtime program.
 - Involve the hospital volunteer coordinator to recruit and train volunteers.
 - Recruit existing volunteers, dietetic interns, students, etc. to assist during mealtimes. This is an excellent way for students/interns to gain experience and interact with patients.
 - A sample volunteer role description, education material, and other tools are available [here](#).
 - Volunteers can help to clear the bedside table, open packages, encourage patients to eat, and provide some social interaction.
 - Volunteers can obtain food preferences from patients and communicate them to the diet technician or dietitian through a communication book.
 - Volunteers can provide eating assistance (feeding) if adequately trained.

Volunteer Programs to Support Standard Care

The chart below provides a few examples from More-2-Eat of mealtime volunteer programs that could be used for standard nutrition care.

Recruitment	Training	Role	Time with each Patient	Eating Assistance Provided
New or existing volunteers	By the dietitian	To check with all patients on the unit to see if anyone requires assistance opening packages etc.	As needed by each patient on the unit.	No
New or existing volunteers	By the dietitian	Any hospital staff member can enrol a patient as per established criteria. Each volunteer visits at least one patient and provides social support, assistance with meal tray set-up, opening packages etc.	Varies with number of patients enrolled and volunteer availability but generally, longer time with each patient.	No
Existing volunteers, interns, trainees, students etc.	By the volunteer coordinator (education developed with nutrition & food services team)	To follow the food service worker as they deliver the trays and check to see that each patient has everything they need, open packages etc.	Short. Typically 20 minutes in total following all the trays then returns to their usual volunteer role.	No
Students in Speech and Language Therapist (SLP) or Nutrition	By an SLP or dietitian	Volunteers check with the nursing staff to see which patients require eating assistance (low risk for choking/not dysphagia patients). Volunteers open packages encourage intake and provide eating assistance (only if trained).	Long. Typically 1 hour per patient.	Yes