

TOP 10

Tips to Maintain Successful Dining Practices During COVID-19

How do we adjust to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID-19 Communal Dining Restrictions in our care communities?

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) memo dated March 13, 2020 includes guidance to “cancel communal dining and all group activities in your Skilled Nursing Facility.”

Facilities should take all reasonably available steps to adhere, given the dire consequences of the spread of COVID-19 among our resident population. How this is implemented must be viewed on a facility-by-facility and day-to-day basis depending on physical plant, staff availability, and resident needs.

NOTE: These tips are for communities and residents that have not been confirmed to be infected with Coronavirus. Each care community’s Infection Preventionist will determine the Dining Policy needed for isolation precautions for infected residents.

- 1** Paper or Porcelain? In the spirit of trying to keep things as “normal” as possible, use your dishware! The ware-washing equipment used by communities can handle sanitizing the dishes.
- 2** Room service is an option. Make the tray memorable with fancy napkins and paper place mats. Add a fresh flower or, better yet, a floral garnish. Have staff send a little note to say hello and have the Activities department provide a word search!
- 3** Virtual salad bars offer a visual of various options to choose from. Virtual menus can be shared via the in-house TV, Internet, iPad, etc. Have the Dietary department record a video of the special each day and show it to the residents so they can see your kitchen staff shine!
- 4** Consider sack lunches for the evening meal. Bake brownies or bar cookies, purchase individual bags of flavored chips, and offer small soda pops! Get creative with the sandwiches; try croissants, marble rye, or soft tortillas for street tacos.
- 5** Hydration, beverages, snack, and dessert carts can be wheeled in the resident hallways, which provides interaction between residents and dietary staff.
- 6** Room trays do not have to be disposable. Be sure that everything is covered and use clear film wrap when you can to save on disposables.
- 7** Limit seating in the dining rooms and keep the social distancing rule of 6 feet. Allow two residents per table and configure the space so tables are spread appropriately throughout the room.
- 8** Ensure that Nursing and Dietary departments have a plan for assisted diners on how best to have staff available to ensure safe dining practices are followed.
- 9** Spread your dining times out to accommodate smaller crowds. The dining window will need to account for your numbers. Interview your residents to see who prefers limited seating dining and who prefers a room tray. Both options should be allowed. Consider breakfast in bed, lunch dining (limited seating), and dinner à la carte.
- 10** Review what you are planning on serving and discuss with your Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) and staff to see what items might need to be modified to fit the adjusted dining environment. Keep in mind, having choices will help keep things as “normal” as possible during this time.

