



A fact sheet for aged care staff and providers

Supporting choice about food and drink in aged care

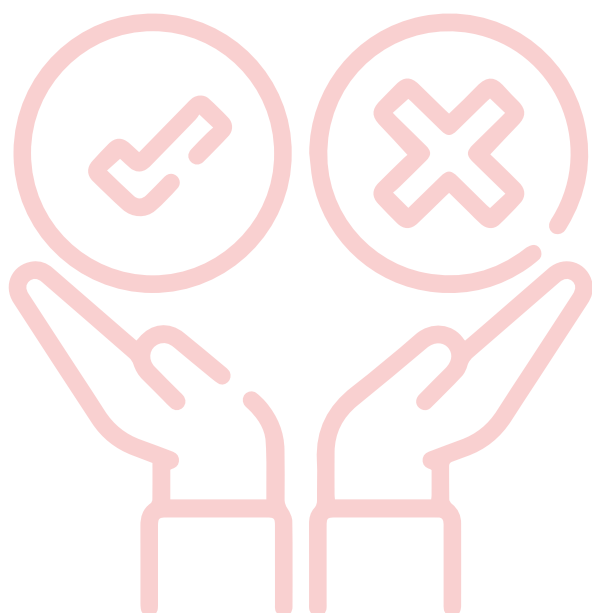
This fact sheet provides an overview for residential aged care staff (including chefs, cooks, food service and care staff) on the requirements and importance of supporting older people's rights to make informed decisions about their food, drink and dining experience.

Choice is a person's right and this right does not change as people age or move into residential aged care.

Why choice matters

Supporting older people to make choices about all aspects of their food, drink and the dining experience is a key part of maintaining their health, wellbeing and quality of life in residential aged care.

The risks of limiting choice may mean older people are less likely to eat and drink. This can cause weight loss, malnutrition, reduced quality of life and wellbeing and dissatisfaction with care.





Supporting older people to make choices is important because it's the:



Right thing to do

Supporting choice respects a person's dignity, who they are and what matters to them, helps to maintain their identity, self-esteem and enhances quality of life.



Smart thing to do

Older people who are supported to make choices are more likely to eat and drink well. This helps to prevent unplanned weight loss and malnutrition, reduces the risk of illness and injury, and increases wellbeing and satisfaction with their aged care experience.



It's your responsibility

Aged care providers and their staff are required to support older people to make choices and decisions about the care and services they receive and the way they receive them, including around food, nutrition and dining. Aged care providers are also required to provide information that is current, accurate and timely. The information should be presented in a way that is clear and easy to understand and supports the person to make an informed choice.

Getting the dining experience right ensures providers meet the Aged Care Quality Standards



Standard 1: Consumer dignity and choice

Consumer outcome

"I am treated with dignity and respect, and can maintain my identity. I can make informed choices about my care and services, and live the life I choose."

Organisation statement

The organisation:

1 (2) (a) has a culture of inclusion and respect for consumers; and

1 (2) (b) supports consumers to exercise choice and independence; and

1 (2) (c) respects consumers' privacy.





Getting the food, nutrition and dining experience right ensures providers meet the requirements of the Aged Care Quality Standards

Older people have the right to live the life they choose in aged care. To make sure they can do this, it's vital that providers work with people receiving care to know which goals, relationships and activities are important to them. This is called **'person-centred care'**.

Another way you can support older people to live the life they choose is by supporting 'dignity of risk'. Risks, within reason, are an essential part of life.

Providers should support older people to make choices and informed decisions when they wish to take managed risks to live a whole and happy life. This requirement under the Aged Care Quality Standards also applies to supporting choices around food, nutrition and dining.

Dignity of risk is another way of saying people receiving aged care have the right to live the life they choose, even if their choices involve some risk. If something a person wants to do involves some risk to them, their aged care provider should support them and their representative to understand the risks and discuss ways to manage these risks. Providers should also respect the older person's wishes and preferences. In relation to supporting dignity of risk around food, nutrition and dining choices, providers should:

- make sure the person understands the risks of their choice to themselves (and to others, if relevant)
- work with the person to manage the risks
- respect the person's decisions.

High-quality care should make older people feel safe, well cared for and respected. The Aged Care Quality Standards are designed to make sure older people agree with the following statement:

Consumer outcome

"I am treated with dignity and respect, and can maintain my identity. I can make informed choices about my care and services, and live the life I choose."





How it's done

✓ **Get to know each resident**

All staff should know (or be able to find in the care plan) each person's preferences, including what, where and when they like to eat, their cultural preferences, their eating habits and be able to recognise when or if these change.

✓ **Discuss residents' preferences regularly with them**

Staff can ask each person what they prefer and review this information regularly with them, as their preferences may change.

Document these discussions and decisions made, so these preferences can be shared with other relevant care staff.

It is important to remember that people living with dementia or cognitive impairment are able to decide what they would like to eat or drink, even if they do not have the capacity to make other decisions such as managing their finances. They should always be included in choosing what they wish to eat and drink.

✓ **When discussing preferences with people living with dementia or cognitive impairment:**

- ask simple questions or ask with photos of food and drinks
- recognise gestural and other non-verbal cues such as turning head away, putting their hand up or closing their mouth
- ask family and friends about the person's known dislikes and likes
- notice and record what they appear to enjoy or dislike, what they eat willingly or refuse
- ask what food on the plate they want to eat if you are assisting them.



Choice is about all aspects of an older person's food, drink, meals and dining, including:

- ✓ where they sit
- ✓ who they sit with
- ✓ when they eat
- ✓ where they eat
- ✓ what food they eat
- ✓ what cutlery they use
- ✓ cultural options
- ✓ how much they eat and drink
- ✓ whether they use clothes protectors.

Choices must be within reason
– reasonably practical for the provider to deliver and meets the requirement of a provider's legislative responsibility.

✓ **Give people information and time to make their decision**

Standard 1, requirements 1(3)(c) and 1(3)(d) Consumers should be provided with all the information they need to make an informed choice. Provide adequate time for residents to consider their options, as well as opportunities for them to change their mind.



✓ **Involve older people in designing the menu and dining experience**

Standard 8, requirement (3)(a) Providers are required to engage consumers in the development, delivery and evaluation of care and services, including food, nutrition and dining care and services. This could be through a consumer advisory body, resident food committee, food tastings, encouraging residents to share recipes and/or co designing menus with chefs.

✓ **Ask about preferences at meal times**

Don't assume preferences remain the same each day. You should check in regularly.

✓ **Engage allied health professionals to recommend appropriate food, fluids and nutrition and mealtime support in partnership with each person, in line with their needs, goals and preferences.**

This may include a dietitian, speech pathologist, physiotherapist, occupational therapist or dental practitioner. Recommendations made by allied health practitioners may need to be reviewed regularly by those practitioners. Provide each resident with the recommendations and the reasoning, including risks and risk mitigation strategies behind them so the resident can make an informed decision. Remember that regardless of the recommendations, it is still up to the resident to make their final informed choice about what they do.

✓ **Document and communicate**

Document the choices and preferences of residents and communicate these to all relevant care staff involved in the person's care.



Some ways to provide more choice at mealtimes include:

- ✓ buffet meals with screens to maintain food hygiene (staff can serve food)
- ✓ restaurant style 'menu ordering'
- ✓ extended mealtime so that people can choose when they eat and how long they take
- ✓ easy to understand menu items so people know what their options are
- ✓ picture menus and photos of food to support people with cognitive impairment to make choices.





What about 'risky' choices and the dignity of risk?

Each older person has the right to dignity of risk about the choices and decisions they make to live a fulfilled life. This includes making choices and decisions about the foods and drinks they consume including when they have swallowing difficulties.

- some residents may choose to accept the risk of consuming foods and drinks that have been identified as a risk. Making these choices is an important part of a resident's quality of life
- some residents may choose to accept the risk of coughing or choking so that they can eat the type of food and drink that they want.

To support people to make informed choices and decisions about the foods and drinks they consume, providers should follow an approach that considers current, good practice. An example of such an approach to supporting older people to make informed choices involving potential food, nutrition and dining risks is 'EDAR' (Eating and Drinking with Acknowledged Risk).

The EDAR process applies the principles of dignity of risk to a food, nutrition and dining context. There are suggested steps that can be taken in this process such as:

- completing a multidisciplinary assessment with input from relevant health professionals where indicated. This may include a speech pathologist (when a swallowing difficulty is present), dietitian, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, oral health professional, pharmacist, nurse and medical practitioner, and discussing the results with the older person
- understand the person's preferences and include these in the assessment
- provide all the relevant information to the person in a way that they can understand so that they can make an informed decision. This should include the risks, benefits and how these risks may be managed and who they will be managed by
- document the process of decision making and management plan
- provide regular review
- share the information with care team members and ensure their training is up to date.





Remember, if an older person makes a choice that presents a risk to themselves, you can:

- ✓ ensure they understand the nature and severity of the risk
- ✓ provide suggestions about how you as the provider and staff could work with them to manage the risk
- ✓ work with them to identify ways to support them to live the life they choose in a way that balances assisting them to exercise the greatest degree of choice while mitigating the risk to themselves and others
- ✓ supporting a person to exercise their dignity of risk does not include placing others at risk
- ✓ strategies should mitigate risks to the person and therefore mitigate risk of harm to others.

If a person has been given all the information and time they need to make an informed choice – in a way they can easily understand – the choice to accept the risk is up to them:

- it is important to remember that older people given food or drink they do not want or like are at risk of not eating or drinking enough
- ensure you give each person all the available options and information, document conversations, support their decision, and communicate this to other staff, including the care staff, food service staff, and chefs and cooks.





More information

Choice posters

Additional fact sheets on choice are available at [Food, nutrition and dining resources | Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission](#):

- Providing food and dining choice
- Food and drink in aged care - supporting informed choice and risk.

Swallowing fact sheets

Additional fact sheets on swallowing are available at [Food, nutrition and dining resources | Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission](#)

- Supporting safe and enjoyable mealtimes for people with swallowing difficulties
- Nutrition and texture modified food and drinks
- Informed choice and supported decision making for people who plan to Eat and Drink with Acknowledged Risk (EDAR).

Phone the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission's Food, Nutrition and Dining Hotline on **1800 844 044** (free call), if you wish to speak with professionals about issues, ideas or concerns in relation to an enjoyable food, nutrition and dining experience in an aged care service. Alternatively, you can contact the Commission's general enquiries line on **1800 951 822** (free call).



1800 844 044

Food, Nutrition and Dining Hotline



Phone

1800 951 822



Web

agedcarequality.gov.au



Write

Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
GPO Box 9819, in your capital city