

Nutrition and Holiday Celebrations

During a Pandemic

NUTRITION CONNECTION



How to create person-centered meals and events while keeping clients safe

The 2020 holiday season is upon us and we are looking at challenges never faced before as we celebrate these special times and events. COVID-19 has introduced some uncertainties as we plan holiday dining and food events while practicing social distancing, wearing masks, and insuring proper hand-washing. This article will address various areas to focus on relating to nutrition, food, and dining to promote positive clinical and quality outcomes for clients, and to enhance their overall enjoyment of the season.

KEY FOOD, NUTRITION, AND DINING FACTORS

Let's look at some key considerations for food, nutrition, and dining during the 2020 holiday season.

Pay Attention to Best Practices

Continue to implement “best practice” recommendations and requirements related to COVID-19. Keep current with professional resources to ensure your overall systems and processes support a safe environment. Credible organizations will be posting timely evidence-based guidance and information related to the holidays and COVID-19. These include government agencies, professional associations, and other entities. (See sidebar for suggestions.)

Keep Food and Nutrition Front and Center

Recognize the importance of food and nutrition during the holiday season. Food and nutrition are an integral part of celebrating and can help make the season enjoyable and



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meaningful. Remember that residents should be engaged in planning and implementing special events involving food.

In addition, find ways to keep families informed and involved. When planning holiday-focused content in newsletters and social media, be sure to add a food component as most people enjoy holiday fare. This might include getting feedback about special foods or recipes enjoyed by the residents that could be adapted in the facility. Consider having contests or virtual sharing for family and residents about special holiday times featuring particular foods, and invite them to submit favorite recipes. After the final recipes are selected, involve the Registered Dietitian Nutritionist and nutrition care team to incorporate them into the holiday menus.

Maximize Nutrient Intake

We continue learning more about the role of nutrition and specific nutrients in the prevention and management of COVID-19. A recent article in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* included several recommendations relating to adults with comorbidities.

Adults with existing comorbidities and not infected with COVID-19 are advised to consume a nutrient-dense

eating pattern to meet protein and energy needs, with oral supplementation when necessary, to prevent and treat malnutrition.

For adults with existing comorbidities and suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection, it's advised to proactively prevent and treat protein-energy wasting by regularly assessing their weight and nutritional status

interventions based on the individual needs of the resident.

Person-centered care involves knowing residents as individuals and engaging them in decision-making about their food and dining. There is more success in overall intake when we can liberalize the diet and offer "real food" instead of supplements. The holidays provide an ideal opportunity



THE HOLIDAYS OFFER TIMES FOR FUN FOODS and beverages that may be fortified as needed. Special holiday shakes that are fortified or prepared with nutritional supplements can be provided.

when possible, and advising adequate protein and energy intake through diet, with supplementation through oral, enteral, or parenteral nutrition when necessary.

In addition to optimizing immune function of the residents, another key consideration is the increased risk for malnutrition. In the aging population, prevention and management of malnutrition has long been a focus area. Celebrating holidays during a pandemic requires continued proactive risk assessments and nutrition

to identify foods the resident recalls fondly from past holiday celebrations with family and friends.

As appropriate and with resident involvement it may be determined that fortified foods are needed to enhance intake and overall nutritional status. The holidays offer times for fun foods or beverages that may be fortified as needed. Special holiday shakes that are fortified or prepared with nutritional supplements can be provided. Many times, food

Continued on page 10

HOLIDAY FOOD RESOURCES AND DINING GUIDANCE

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), www.cdc.gov
- Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), www.cms.gov
- Food and Drug Administration (FDA), www.fda.gov
- State and local health departments

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, www.eatright.org
- Association of Nutrition & Foodservice Professionals (ANFP), www.anfponline.org
- American Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (ASPEN), www.nutritioncare.org/COVID19/
- American Health Care Association (AHCA), National Center for Assisted Living, www.ahcancal.org
- LeadingAge, www.leadingage.org
- The Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine (AMDA), <https://paltc.org>

MISCELLANEOUS

Manufacturers and distributors will be providing recipes, seasonal products, and other items to assist with holiday food events.

distributors or manufacturers provide some exceptionally tasty recipes.

When considering the use of fortified foods or nutritional supplements, keep these factors in mind:

- Assess the individual needs of residents based on their diagnoses, symptoms, preferences, volume tolerated, and nutritional needs.
- Assess availability of staffing to include food service, nursing, and others in making decisions about food and beverages that will be offered and well tolerated.
- Monitor preferences and acceptance by the resident and their nutrition outcomes.
- Compare the cost related to the current budget with overall efficiency and outcomes.

Find Connection and Engagement

Minimize social isolation and loneliness. A recent publication from the National Academies of Sciences shared strong evidence that many older adults are socially isolated or lonely in ways that put their health in jeopardy. Social isolation has been associated with a significantly increased risk of premature mortality from all causes, and approximately 50 percent increased risk of developing dementia. Loneliness among heart failure patients has been associated with a nearly four times increased risk of death, 68 percent increased risk of hospitalization, and 57 percent increased risk of emergency room visits.

As precautions are in place during the pandemic, be sure to find connection and engagement with the residents throughout the holiday season. This may be done through resident communication via social media with family, friends, and visitors, or in small group settings that can accommodate social distancing.

Dining area considerations will continue to be based on the facility-specific phase of reopening. Holiday food and dining requires planning to accommodate:

- Total number of tables needed
- Seating times and availability, with limited numbers of residents dining together
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) for the dining areas
- Taking the temperature of individuals
- Proper hand-washing
- Correct use of sanitizers
- Preventing spread of disease related to menu options, serving food and beverages, table service

- Precautions and use of disposables per the CDC
- Removing meals and food items from rooms for infection control
- Clear communication using signage, in-house display videos, greeting verbiage, social media, etc.
- Keeping residents and staff informed of menu changes

Make Holiday Food and Dining Fun

Find ways to make holiday food and dining enjoyable for residents or patients and staff. Food evokes emotions and offers comfort and reassurance to residents. It is important to plan for the holiday mealtime atmosphere to include appropriate lighting, music, festive décor, and seasonal aromas. Consider using real dinnerware instead of disposable items within CDC guidelines for COVID-19 to promote “home-like” holiday meals.

Person-centered care and helping residents with meals and snacks during COVID-19 requires enhanced “resident engagement.”

Improve communication and resident engagement during mealtimes by:

- Pausing 6 feet away from the resident, gesturing and greeting by name
- Making eye contact
- Finding something to compliment, and remaining calm when serving or talking with the resident during meal service

WRAPPING IT UP

The 2020 holiday season offers challenges as we celebrate these special times and events during a pandemic. Success with proper nutrition, food, and dining requires teamwork that is focused on the importance of celebrating the holidays with resident and family involvement. It is all about food and events that are person-centered while provided in a safe environment. Make the season special for each resident to help ensure positive clinical and quality outcomes. **E**







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ARTICLE REFERENCES

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CE Questions | NUTRITION CONNECTION



This Level I article assumes that the reader has entry level knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to ensure a foundation of basic concepts of the subject matter.

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1. Key focus areas for COVID-19 during the holidays include:
 - A. Social distancing, wearing masks and appropriate PPE, hand-washing
 - B. Buying COVID-19 specialty foods, wearing masks, requiring gloves
 - C. Using approved COVID-19 distributors, requiring all foods to be COVID tested
2. Proper social distancing requires a minimum of _____ feet between individuals.
 - A. 4
 - B. 6
 - C. 8
3. For residents with existing comorbidities and not infected with COVID-19 the following is advised:
 - A. Oral supplements with all meals
 - B. Nutrient-dense eating pattern to meet protein and energy needs with oral supplementation when necessary
 - C. Nutrient-dense eating patterns and a multiple vitamin/mineral
4. Adults with existing comorbidities with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 need proactive prevention and treatment of _____.
 - A. Vitamin D deficiency
 - B. Amino acid deficiencies
 - C. Protein-energy wasting
5. Social isolation and loneliness has been associated with significantly increased risk of premature _____ and 50 percent increased risk of developing _____.
 - A. Mortality, dementia
 - B. Baldness, osteoporosis
 - C. Dry skin, skin cancer
6. Holiday foods and food events should be _____ with resident and family involvement.
 - A. Person-centered
 - B. Served in resident rooms only
 - C. Low in fat and calories
7. Communication with residents during COVID-19 and engaging them at mealtime can be promoted by:
 - A. Having foodservice employees remove their masks so residents can see their smile
 - B. Pausing 6 feet away, gesturing, greeting by name, and making eye contact
 - C. Holding the hands of residents after their meal is delivered, so they can feel skin-to-skin contact