

# Serving Up Joy and Nutrition

for the Holidays

NUTRITION CONNECTION



Use the holidays to create food experiences that promote a feeling of well-being and contentment

The word “joy” is defined by Merriam-Webster as “a feeling or state of well-being and contentment.” Holidays traditionally are a time of joy for family and friends with fond memories of previous celebrations spent together.

For residents in long-term care, however, the holidays can become just another reminder that they are removed from their former communities and loved ones. Many times, residents have family members and friends who no longer live nearby or have passed away. Others, because of physical or cognitive challenges, find they are unable to participate in those highly-valued traditions, or they struggle to recall specific details from precious long-ago celebrations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly added to the challenge of creating a joyful time for residents during the holidays. Balancing safety with the enjoyment of meal and food activities has become a dilemma for residents and families wanting to honor their traditions and create new memories. Isolation can lead to loneliness, which goes well beyond mental health and is associated with an increased risk of heart attack or stroke. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shared results of a study indicating that among heart failure patients, those who experienced loneliness had a four-times increased risk of death.<sup>1</sup>

While the long-lasting consequences of COVID-19 are still emerging, there is evidence to indicate that symptoms affecting nutrition—including fatigue, muscle weakness, sleep difficulties, anxiety and/or depression—are persistent.



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Individualized nutritional care promoting adequacy of nutrients and enhanced quality of life must be a priority.

Holidays are a time when food and food events become even more important and can help create experiences that promote a feeling or state of well-being and contentment. This is an excellent opportunity to review nutrition goals and approaches supporting positive outcomes. Nutritional care continues with the need for identifying malnutrition risk with prompt referral for a comprehensive assessment.

This article provides suggestions for the 2021 holidays, with the goal of promoting joy while also supporting individualized nutrition goals.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD AND TRADITIONS

Each facility has a unique opportunity to help make the holidays extra special for long-term care residents. Beyond providing nutrition, food means many things to different people and is personal to each individual.

Due to self-directed living initiatives, residents in long-term care can exercise a great deal of control over their food and dining practices. They have greater flexibility in regards to mealtimes,

food preferences, dining locations, and amount of food consumed. Food is one of the few things residents still have control over when they live in a long-term care facility when so many other choices are gone. It's crucial to actively support personal preferences at mealtimes.

At times, the RDN, the CDM, CFPP, and the foodservice team are very busy trying to meet the changing preferences of residents. It's important to remember that choices and preferences may further increase during the holiday season. Honoring choices in terms

## Listen

Find out what is important to your residents. You may not be able to recreate all their favorite holiday traditions, but you can listen. Simply hearing and engaging in their story validates whatever they may be thinking and feeling.

## Embrace Ethnic and Cultural Traditions

The numbers and proportions of older people of diverse racial and ethnic origins in the United States continue to increase. In 1990, ethnic minorities represented 13 percent of the population age 65 and older. That figure rose



**NOW IS AN EXCELLENT TIME** to review residents' nutritional goals and approaches to support positive outcomes.

of food and meals provides a significant opportunity to support positive experiences for residents, while also promoting optimal intake.

## HOW TO MAKE THE HOLIDAYS SPECIAL

There are many ways to make the holidays memorable for the individuals in your care. Consider the following:

to 23 percent by 2020, and it's projected to increase to 36 percent by 2050. This jump is due to both higher birth rates and more immigration among racial and ethnic minority populations.

The growth in the number of older people of diverse backgrounds, changes in disability rates among the different racial and ethnic

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groups, and patterns of both formal and informal long-term supportive service use among these populations need to be considered when planning holiday menus and food events. Make sure there are seasonal food choices that reflect the diverse makeup of your client population. If you're unfamiliar with the specialty dishes and holiday customs that are unique to ethnic resident groups, do some research. Or—better yet—engage individually with as many people as possible to learn about preparing traditional foods that would appeal to your residents' taste buds.

### Review Therapeutic Diet Orders and Promote a Liberalized Diet

For residents on modified diets, review the current diet order to determine if there is a demonstrated benefit for continuing the modifications. Are they showing improved outcomes based solely on the dietary modifications? If not, then consider requesting that the diet be liberalized to support improved intake and better outcomes.

If a modified diet is in fact necessary, consider requesting a physician order to allow a “meal of choice” during the holidays or even a meal of choice weekly or monthly.

## RESOURCES FOR HEALTHY MEAL IDEAS

- American Heart Association (<https://www.heart.org/en>) “Healthy Heart Recipes” at <https://recipes.heart.org/en>
- National Kidney Foundation (<https://www.kidney.org/>) “Kidney Friendly Recipes” at <https://www.kidney.org/recipes-search>
- American Diabetes Association (<https://www.diabetes.org/>) “Meal Planning” at <https://www.diabetes.org/healthy-living/recipes-nutrition/meal-planning>
- Gluten Intolerance Group (<https://gluten.org/>) “Meal Planning” at <https://gluten.org/2021/04/13/gluten-free-meal-plans/> or “Recipes and Food Prep Resources” at <https://gluten.org/?s=recipes&x=14&y=6>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) “Healthy Menu Ideas For Holiday Celebrations” at <https://www.nutrition.gov/topics/shopping-cooking-and-meal-planning/culture-and-food>

### For Residents Requiring Modified Diets, Look for New Holiday Recipes Which Support Healthy Choices

Residents who require therapeutic diets should be served holiday foods that support healthy choices, such as low sodium, modified consistency, etc. Seek input from residents on the recipes they want to have at the meal or event. See the article sidebar for healthy meal resources.

In addition, food distributors and manufacturers are often excellent sources of holiday recipes through their websites or promotional materials.

### Communicate with Family Members

In many long-term care facilities, loved ones may not be able to make in-person visits this holiday season due to continued COVID-19 restrictions. So, make arrangements for a phone or video chat. Or encourage family members to mail cards with photos. Take this opportunity to share information about seasonal events and meals being served to residents so that family members can better engage with their loved one.

### Plan a Resident's Choice Holiday Meal

This is a wonderful way to engage residents and give them something special to anticipate. Even if they cannot plan their traditional meal or gathering at home, they can help plan a meal for the facility.

Meet with the resident council and seek input on foods they would like to see offered. Be sure to include tabletop décor and linens to reflect the festive nature of the meal.

### HYDRATION IS IMPORTANT

Remember the importance of hydration during the busy holiday season. Generally, water is the preferred source of hydration, but we recognize that drinking water all the time can get boring.

The holidays offer opportunities to find new recipes for specialty seasonal beverages, flavored waters, coffee, milk, or juice. Reach out to food distributors, and visit product manufacturer websites which promote festive beverage recipes. Items such as cranberry mocktails, mulled apple cider, holiday punch, and peppermint hot chocolate can provide a tasty treat while hydrating your clients.

Explore ways to increase variety and times of hydration passes, offer additional beverages at mealtimes, and provide fluids

## REFERENCE

1. *Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Healthcare System*, The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press: <https://doi.org/10.17226/25663>



with medication passes. Incorporate hydration into different parts of their day. Encourage fluids at every meal and in-between meals. Activities and rehab sessions can incorporate offering beverages. Small amounts of fluids consumed throughout the day may be better tolerated than larger volumes a few times.

## SUMMING IT UP

Holidays are a time when food and food events become even more important for individuals in long-term care. It's critical to help create experiences that promote a feeling or state of well-being and contentment. Now is an excellent time to review residents' nutritional goals and approaches to support positive

outcomes. The focus on nutrition during the holidays includes providing the appropriate meal plan for the individual based on their health status, while also honoring personal choices and preferences. Create a joyful 2021 holiday season with meals and food events that promote healthy nutrition and support quality of life. **E**

## CE Questions | NUTRITION CONNECTION



*This Level I article provides basic resources. The desired outcome is to ensure a basic understanding and explanation of concepts of the subject matter and recalling of related facts.*

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- The Centers for Disease and Control and Prevention shared results of a study indicating that among heart failure patients, those who experienced loneliness had a \_\_\_\_ times increased risk of death.
  - Two
  - Four
  - Six
- The COVID-19 pandemic has created the challenge of striking a balance between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of meals during the holidays.
  - Safety, enjoyment
  - Labor, technology
  - Staffing, budgets
- Engage residents in food events and meal planning by attending \_\_\_\_\_ meetings to get their input.
  - Care plan
  - Resident council
  - Rehabilitation
- Modified diets should be reviewed to determine if there is a demonstrated \_\_\_\_\_ for remaining on the dietary modification.
  - Effort
  - Savings
  - Benefit
- Modified diets should be \_\_\_\_\_ as much as possible to support improved nutrition intake and quality of life.
  - Liberalized
  - Promoted
  - Implemented
- Ethnic minorities represented 13 percent of the population age 65 and older in 1990, and that figure is projected to increase to \_\_\_\_ percent by 2050.
  - 21
  - 30
  - 36
- Individualized nutritional care promoting adequacy of \_\_\_\_\_ and enhanced quality of life must be a priority with food and food events.
  - Dinnerware
  - Nutrients
  - Staffing

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