

Food Quality

Food: Any substance eaten to provide nutritional support for the body.

Ultimately the quality of food is determined by the person eating it. If a food meets all the nutritional and food safety standards but it is not eaten, it will not nourish the person.

Food needs to be of a high enough quality that centre staff are willing to eat it and therefore sign off on it. Ideally all proposed menu changes should be discussed with and trialed with residents, carers and families before they are made. One way to trial changes is to hold a "Taste Test" which can also provide you with documented feedback on proposed new foods (See *Information Sheet 9: Food Tasting Sessions*). Facilities can also benefit from residents, carers and families submitting recipes for possible inclusion in new menus (See *Information Sheet 12: Recipe Book*).

Perception of the quality of any food and the factors driving hunger depend on many parameters, such as physiological mechanisms, sensory factors, psychological factors and environmental factors (including cultural).

The food requirements of individuals will vary across all these parameters and Food Service needs to be flexible enough to adapt to the varied requirements.

Food is more than a group of nutrients. Food has to be physiologically appropriate (have enough energy), and appeal to the senses; that is it must have taste, smell, texture and visual appeal. Individual psychological factors such as cognitive ability can impact on perception of food. This effect can be seen when residents with cognitive impairment respond in a positive way to moulded puree food but have a negative response to the same puree food served as a scoop in a bowl (See *Information Sheet 17: Improving Pureed Meals*). Environmental factors such as the dining room experience, for example, ambience, are also very important and can be improved with some simple measures such as putting coloured tablecloths on the dining room tables (See *Information Sheet 19: Dining Room Experience*).

Careful consideration of all these parameters can result in a positive experience for the residents and optimise their food intake. Food should make the consumer feel good.

"We were asked by the Dietitian to find something for Mrs Smith to eat. She was on a Puree diet but was not eating anything. We discussed this with the team and decided we could produce moulded puree foods. As a result Mrs Smith began eating and recovered."

Food Service Manger

"As I ate the oysters with their strong taste of the sea and their faint metallic taste that the cold white wine washed away, leaving only the sea taste and the succulent texture, and as I drank their cold liquid from each shell and washed it down with the crisp taste of the wine, I lost the empty feeling and began to be happy and to make plans."

Ernest Hemingway