

# Supported Mealtimes

## A guide for patients and visitors

### Introduction

NHS Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) helps NHS Boards improve patient care. They updated their standards in 2014, which provide guidance on all aspects of how we should ensure patients receive the food, fluid and nutritional care they need.

In NHS Dumfries and Galloway a Nutrition and Hydration Group includes staff and public members who meet on a regular basis and work together to achieve quality nutritional care for patients within NHS Dumfries and Galloway care settings.

### Background

25-34% patients admitted to hospital are at risk of malnutrition\*. Research has shown that ill health and a stay in hospital can make poor nutrition even worse. Patients have individual nutritional needs that must be met in order to help them to recover from illness and to help the treatment they receive to be effective.

### NHS Dumfries and Galloway Policy on Supported Mealtimes

NHS Dumfries and Galloway updated its Supported Mealtimes policy in 2017. The purpose of this is to protect patients' mealtimes from unnecessary and avoidable interruptions. This aims to provide a peaceful environment for eating and to give staff the time to serve meals and assist those who need help with meals. This applies to breakfast, lunch and evening meals and includes time for patients to prepare for meals e.g. going to the toilet and washing hands.

Mealtimes are an important part of patient care, providing nutrition to aid recovery from ill health and a time for patients to socialise with each other.

The aims of the policy are

- To improve the meal experience for patients by allowing them to eat without interruption
- To improve the nutritional care of patients by helping them to eat and drink if needed
- To support ward teams in the delivery of food at mealtimes
- To promote mealtimes as a key social activity for patients



To ensure that these aims are met NHS HIS state that 'all non essential staff activity (clinical and non-clinical) is stopped during patient mealtimes'.

## What do we mean by 'non-essential staff activity'?

While in hospital it is essential that appropriate care is given, for example urgent investigations and treatment.

The following examples are activities that must be stopped during mealtimes;

- Ward rounds
- Medication rounds (unless medicines are required at this time)
- Routine recording of pulse and blood pressure in stable patients
- Routine blood tests
- Routine heart tests
- Routine assessment and treatments by other health professionals, unless helping patients nutritional care
- Routine investigations, for example X-rays

## What about visitors during mealtimes?

**We encourage relatives/carers to attend the ward during mealtimes if they are helping and supporting patients to eat. Please speak to staff on the ward/unit if you feel this applies to you.**

It is important, for both your relative/friend and those around them, to feel they have the time and privacy to eat meals at their own pace.

In order for staff to focus on providing meals and helping patients to eat and drink it would be appreciated if you could avoid phoning during meal times.

Each ward/unit has slightly different mealtimes due to meal delivery schedules and different catering methods. Mealtimes are displayed at the ward/on the board just outside or ask the ward team about their specific mealtimes.

Visiting times may vary slightly for each ward, but as a general rule the following times apply for visiting;

- **2.00 pm– 8.00 pm**

## Evaluation of the Supported Mealtimes Policy

Supported Mealtimes are regularly monitored and issues raised are addressed. Your feedback is important to ensure Supported Mealtimes are a success. Please let staff know your comments.

\* BAPEN, 2016

This leaflet is also available on request in other formats by phoning 01387 272789.