

Supported Mealtimes

A guide for patients and visitors

Introduction

NHS Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) supports NHS Boards improve patient care. As part of their ongoing reviews in relation to healthcare improvement 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 when they are in hospital.

In NHS Dumfries and Galloway we have a Strategic Nutrition and Hydration Group which 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% of 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 updates its Supported Mealtimes policy regularly. The purpose of this policy 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 Health Improvement Scotland 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 at all times, for example urgent investigations and treatment. Sometimes these care investigations will interrupt mealtimes.

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. Please ask the ward team about their specific mealtimes.

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.

*Reference: *British Association for Parental and Enteral Nutrition (BAPEN) 2016*

This leaflet is also available on request in other formats by phoning 01387 272711.