



GOOD MEAL TIME (GMT) : MAKING MOST OF MEAL TIME FOR PATIENTS

Nursing Science

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ABSTRACT

Food and nutrition is important to the recovery of patients and so is the meal time experience. A good meal time experience is an important part of an overall positive hospital experience. Group Director Nursing ,Apollo Hospital group has developed some strategies to create Good meal Time experience for the patients .They are First feed and delight in every bite .Creating first feed moments for patient who are starting the feed after surgery ,feeding patient in coma ,post natal mother and normal and sick newborn. Delite in every bite is creating good meal time experience as habit for nurses in their day to day care of patients .Some new initiative such as Red Tray system in which the feeding tray or trolley is indicated with red as a cue that the patient need assistance for feeding ;Priority Tag or Fast forward tag suggest that the meal should be served first as the patient has some special needs for meal or starting meal after NBM.meals can be made colorful and in different mould for children .Nurses are central to optimizing a Good meal time experience for patients. It requires a team culture that prioritizes assisted mealtime by the whole team. It is vital in improving patient food intake, attitudes towards nutrition and the meal time experience as a whole.

KEYWORDS

Meal time , Hospitalized patients ,First feed, patient experience,Good meal time,Nutrition for patients

Introduction

Eating well and enjoying food is fundamentally important for every individual's health and well being. Mealtimes play a crucial role in a person's mental health and quality of life, too. In a hospital setting, appealing food and good nutrition is vitally important. Food and nutrition is important to the recovery of patients and so is the meal time experience. A good meal time experience is an important part of an overall positive hospital experience.

We take extra care of our loved ones when they fall sick. We give them nutritious meals and we ensure that they eat well so that they recover soon. There is so much of attention that we give to their food. We give them what they like, we offer different varieties like porridge, toast, soup & curries to keep them happy & full . While we care so much for a sick family member ,we should also shower our love & care for our sick patients . They need it too!!

“A meal for the patient is an experience. Its more than just food. Its an act of care for the patients”

Barriers for good meal time experience

A. Patient Factors

- 1.Acute illness, missing meals due to medical and surgical procedures being performed at mealtimes
- 2.Rigid mealtimes (often too close together), busy, noisy environments, non-essential meal interruptions
- 3.Appetite - suppressing medication, lack of patient awareness on nutrition and proper meals
- 4.Inability to cater to food preferences for patients with cognitive impairment. Cultural & religious beliefs related to food

B. Nursing factors

- 1.Nurses do not tend to support nutrition requirements outside of their allocated patients
- 2.Limited influence over nutritional needs of the patient. E.g, Nurses have no role over scheduling mealtimes
- 3.Inaccurately captured patient acuity, No meal time assistance or mealtimes being treated as a task
- 4.Lack of time and a high pressure work environment

Point of focus to improve meal time experience

- Provide friendly, positive environment for eating the meal; a brief chat with a patient can be encouraging
- Ensure meals are delivered on time
- Remove barriers to food intake; put the tray close to the patient, open packages
- Have food available for patients outside of mealtimes, and for those who have missed a meal

Strategies to create Good Meal time

Group director of Nursing ,Apollo Hospitals group has developed some strategies to create good meal time experience for the patients

1.First feed

The first meal is significant for a patient who has been fasting since 10-12 hours/ over night.

After long hours of fasting, Patients become dehydrated, they display physiological signs including hypotension, tachycardia, oliguria, confusion and a decreased level of consciousness.

This, together with the psychosocial factors of fasting - being unable to eat or drink like other patients - can make being NBM an unpleasant experience.

It is also important to ensure that there is no delay in the procedure/surgery for which the patient has been fasting, as this delay will further push the meal time. In case of any delay, Nurse can talk to the consultant and start an Intravenous infusion. Older people, children, pregnant women and patients who are critically ill are particularly vulnerable when they are on NBM.

1.1 First feed moments

Good meal time experience should be created for the patients who starts their first feed as follows,

1.1.1 After surgery or any Procedure :Breaking the fast post-operatively or post procedure or for any other reason. The meal should be provided timely as per doctor's orders. Indent for the meal on time. The patient should not be kept waiting & patient preference should be asked wherever possible.

After major surgeries when patient recovers the patient's diet will be gradually changed from liquid to semi-solid / from semi-solid to solid. These moments should be made special for the patient & family. Engage the family wherever possible, they will feel involved & will be happy to see the patient's progress.

1.1.2 Comatose patient: Feeding and hydrating an unconscious patient is difficult. The normal chewing & swallowing process is bypassed, a nasogastric tube delivers liquid nutrition directly to the stomach.

This may be a difficult time for the family. They will be worried for their loved one.. Talk to them & explain that the calorie requirement shall be fulfilled. Give the “first feed” in their presence, this shall help to relieve some anxiety and assure them of the patient's well-being.

1.1.3 Post natal mother :If anybody deserves a good meal, it's a

person who just had a baby. A woman who has just delivered a baby, must have gone through so much stress & anxiety. The nurse must ensure the "first feed" that she takes as a new mother.

Display a card at the bed side with a congratulation message and also about the importance of nutrition for a new mother. Before sending her for the procedure, nurse can ask her what she would like to have as the first meal post delivery – but this should be done with the permission of the consultant. Once she is back, allow her to settle down, and check her physical condition & prepare her for her first meal.

Encourage family members to be present (family member of her choice can feed her the first bite). Make it celebratory. The staff must connect with a meal/warm beverage (as advised) and share with the patient the joy of becoming a mother ... this heart warming connect shall stay with her forever!

1.1.4 Newborn : The first feed for the newborn may be direct breast feeding by mother or feeding expressed breast milk to the baby through paladai or ryles tube.

For breast feeding mothers, help the mother with first time latching where she establishes connect with her baby. Be with the mother and provide the required support.

When breast milk cannot be provided or baby is unable to take feed directly from the mother, the staff feeds or helps to feed EBM through paladai/bottle. The mother/father must be involved during the feeding process, this helps them to connect with the baby.

The parents of sick baby are always worried about the well-being of their child. The nurse must ensure that parents are involved in the care process wherever possible which helps to relieve the anxiety. The parents can be asked to stand along when feed is being given through Ryle's tube.

2. Delite in every bite

The hospitals consist of varied groups of people admitted for treatment. Their nutritional and dietary requirements vary according to no. of factors like age, physical condition and illness. Nurses should ensure patients get their meal on time in accordance with their requirements. Nursing teams should instill a culture of Good Meal Time experience as a part of their day to day duties.

2.1 Nurses Responsibility to create Good Meal Time

2.1.1 Pre meal arrival

- Keep an eye on the arrival of food trolley.
- Get the patients ready to have their meals. Help them with washing hands and toileting.
- The meal time should be noise free and calm environment without any interruptions.
- Help in mealtime positioning and observe the patient. (Be mindful of preventing patient fall due to meals been eaten sitting at the bedside).
- Draw the curtains/ blinds and play soft music. (with due permissions).

2.1.2 During Meal

- Clear the cardiac table, and ensure enough space for the meal tray. Put the tray close to the patient.
- Provide feeding assistance to patients during beginning of the meal like opening food tray, pouring a water etc
- Food served should be of good quality, warm, fresh and have variety. Ensure food served is culturally acceptable by the patient.
- Recheck on the patients if they require mid meal assistance.

2.1.3 After Meal

- Prepare a patient food monitoring chart. Document what has been eaten and in what quantity.
- A receptacle should be placed for the used plates. (Do not keep the plates on the floor)
- Provide the patient with hot towel wipes post meal completion. (Talk to F & B, if finger bowls can be provided to sick and immobile patients)
- Provide patient and family education regarding nutritional intake in consultation with the dietitian

3. New initiatives

Group Director nursing has developed some initiatives as below which

is practiced in all Apollo across the country. These new initiatives were implemented after discussion with the Units heads and collaboration with food and beverages department

As a part of this initiative, units practice '**Red tray system**' where patients previously identified as requiring feeding assistance have their meal delivered on a red tray or have a red indicator which acts as a visual cue to all staff.

Food trays of patients who are diabetics/ breaking NBM or a special needs meal owing to their medical condition, had "**Priority Tag**" or labelled as "**Fast Forward**" and these patients should be served food first.

Make colourful meals for children, suggest F & B to use different shape moulds to present food. Place puzzles/ crosswords in their food trays.

Summary

For many of us, mealtimes are an essential part of our daily routine. Whether it's a chance to sit down with family and catch up on the events of the day, they are about more than simply satisfying our appetites and it is important too! For patients admitted in hospitals mealtimes can be even more important. A good meal time experience can help enhance nutritional intake and contribute to the mental and physical well-being of the patient. Nurses are central to optimizing a good Meal time experience for patients. It requires a team culture that prioritizes assisted mealtime by the whole team. It is vital in improving patient food intake, attitudes towards nutrition and the meal time experience as a whole.

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