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Dining Health

Refers to the environment we create to improve the eating experience. Where we eat, with whom we eat, and when we eat might be equally if not MORE important in determining how much we eat and which foods we eat than the food itself.

Food is a necessity for survival. But our association with food is complex and deeply rooted in family history and culture. Food is how many of us show love. It can be a creative expression. It can symbolize the change of seasons. It can be tied to our religion or our beliefs. It becomes our identity. Food has more meaning than the nutrition. With changes in swallowing that may happen with ALS, the conversation stems from worry about losing weight. But we don't eat nutrition, we eat food. If we can return the conversation back to food enjoyment, and the dining experience, the desire to eat can be improved.

These are ideas that you can pull out when needed. This is not a complete "recipe" but tips that will help and provide ideas to make some positive memories out of dining experiences.

3 Key Ingredients of Dining Health:

1) Set the Stage
2) Picking the moment
3) Make it social

Set the Stage : Create Anticipation

A.Replace the Food Provisioning Process: They might not be involved in the food provisioning process: buying the food, preparing, cooking, and cleaning up. This involvement increases engagement with eating.

Solution: Talk about the foods that will be served beforehand. The ingredients, flavors, the foods in season, how pre-prepared foods were made, and where it came from.
Even if they cannot engage in this part of the process, it will increase expectation for a positive food experience.

Studies show If one expects the food to be good through communication, then the rating of this food is higher.

B. Appeal to the senses
Sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch are not affected by ALS.

Sight: Appearance is the #1 driver for putting food in your mouth.

Taste and Texture (touch): put opposing flavors together. Puree can dilute the flavors of foods and this can be a challenge. Make food flavorful! Stronger flavors can be easier to swallow than bland foods. Add herbs, seasoning, salts or citrus juices to enhance taste. Temperature matters to taste and to the ease of swallowing. We all have "eating behaviors" which may help predict how we will respond to a modified texture diet.

Smell: Have them seated near the kitchen to smell the aromas and anticipate. This is a powerful method of bringing in positive, nurturing food memories. Ex: spaghetti sauce, chicken noodle soup, cinnamon.

Hearing: See music below

C. **Perception of Variety:** It has been shown that providing variety can increase consumption rates of food.
Food Variety: Think of this in terms of flavors and textures. Transitional foods are a possible way of increasing texture variety. Often flavors in puddings and shakes are sweet. Change this by making savory smoothies that are packed with nutrition, add protein powders. Make delicious vegetable-based smoothies. Try new recipes. I will be sharing my favorites at www.savorease.com.

Changing the Environment: The perception of variety can be manipulated by the eating environment. So you might not need to alter the foods to improve satisfaction.

D. **Perception of ethnicity:**

Food Itself:
Can go either way based on prior experience. What makes foods ethnic: Bell and Paniesin varied the sauce, spice blend and name of ethnic items and found the sauce was the most important feature.
The Environment : can also play into perception of ethnicity of foods. If you put a red checkered table cloth for Italian night. Perhaps play with ethnic music selection. Situational changes can sometimes make the difference so we don't only have to rely on the food itself.

Picking the moment: Situational Elements

Energy level:

Anxious? Tired? eating soft foods that require less/minimal chewing (i.e.: puddings, ice cream, yogurt, soups, egg and tuna salads, mashed potatoes with gravy and oatmeal)

Curious? Engaged? Best time to try new foods. **A food not tried is a food not liked.** But a mere exposure can increase acceptance and trying it again. Information can function like exposure such as the ingredients, how it can be used, where it comes from, fun facts about it.

The best time to eat might not fall neatly into breakfast, lunch or dinner time
So…

a) Plan for ready-made or easy to prepare snacks for convenience and access.
b) Slower eating might lead to more frequent, mini meals. Every eating time is valuable. Make it calorie and nutrition dense. Finishing your food is a success. Make the portion manageable.
c) Pick foods that don't become unpalatable with time or that the texture changes with time.

Making it Social:

Music: ask in chat to list their favorite music to eat to. Tempo should be slow, the volume is soft and it has been shown to lead to increased time enjoying eating.
Visual modelling: eating the same foods and enjoying the foods, increases the chances that they will eat and enjoy.
Sit together, and share a common meal. Or…
Have people on a zoom call that are sharing similar foods at the same time.
Visual modelling has been shown to increase consumption of foods and liquids. The key is to make the foods appealing to everyone. This is where real food smoothies come into play or sauces that are the same or transitional foods.

Relax and Enjoy:
Reduce anxiety and improve confidence for you and your loved one can make the eating experience more enjoyable for both. Worrying about the texture appropriateness can take away from the experience if they are on a modified texture diet. By identifying the texture of the foods with simple at home tests, you will be able to have more variety to your meals. Understand IDDSI if they are on a modified texture diet. Increase confidence by knowing the tests used to measure foods and liquids. You can go to www.iddsi.org.

Dr. Reva Barewal is a dentist, trained chef and leading expert on dining health for the elderly. She has developed innovative food products to improve nutrition and dining enjoyment. For more information, visit www.savorease.com.