

**Elder Options, Inc.**

**Resource Library**

*Subject: Meals*

## **When “Meal Prep.” Is Necessary**

**(Note: This was originally written for in-home provider employees but can apply to anyone fixing meals for someone needing assistance with meals and eating.)**

Many of you regularly prepare meals for clients as part of your duties. The client may be reluctant to eat, say she/he is not hungry, or eat little or nothing that is prepared. Many older clients in particular can be malnourished without even knowing it. It can affect energy, activity, and memory. Here are some ideas to help encourage good, healthy eating:

Plan the meal together. Have the client set the table as you open the tomato soup. Talk about having grilled cheese sandwiches as you fix them reminding them of the lunch counter at the old 5 & 10 Cent Store. *Example: Whenever I was sick and stayed home from school, my mother always used to fix me a bowl of tomato soup.*

Fix something that smells good. Aromatherapy can stimulate an appetite when the smell is just so good, you can't wait to sit down and eat. It can be as simple as a piece of toast or the smell of garlic in garlic bread.

Create a calming environment. Clear off an eating space for both of you. Use placemats or a tablecloth. Even though it may be just a lunch or breakfast, make it a regular meal.

Plan meals around the client's routine. Talk with the client and see which meal is the main meal – lunch or dinner. If the client worked nights for years, find out when would like to eat or have a late evening snack.

Modify the eating environment. If there is memory impairment, simplify the table setting for easy use and understanding. Make sure the individual can reach the table, the silverware and handle them with ease. Don't hover but be available if someone needs some hands on assistance. If you're not sure, say, “Can I help you with that?” Don't just take over.

Be patient. It may take the client longer to eat than you are used to. Let them take their time. Sit and drink a cup of tea, visit with them and just let them finish. If they get distracted and forget to eat, a verbal cue may bring them back to the meal.

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