

"Focus"

Dining: How to Assist Individuals Who Have Vision Loss

Use of Color, Contrast and Lighting

For individuals with some vision, it can be very helpful when items set on the table contrast in color from the tabletop.

It is helpful to have available two sets of dishes and bowls – one light in color and one dark. Serve light-colored foods on dark-colored dishes and dark-colored foods on light-colored dishes. Use contrasting colored place mats between the dishes and the table.

Also make sure that the lighting is comfortable and adequate for the individual and does not produce glare.



Have the person sit with his back to the window.

Dim overhead lights appropriately to reduce shadows and reflections.

Provide task lighting that is positioned below eye level and illuminates the food.



poor contrast



better contrast

Verbal Description

Tell the person what and where items are located on the table as well as on the plate. If the person understands what a clock looks like, then use the clock face analogy:

Place Setting: water @ 2:00, fork @9:00

Plate: potatoes @ 12:00, chicken @ 3:00

Or, use any other descriptors/directional terms (left, right, middle or top, bottom, side, etc.) that are meaningful to the person for describing where items are located.



Dining (continued)

Hand Under Hand

It may be helpful to have the individual lay his hand over yours as you slowly slide your hand across the table to locate the items on the table. Identify each item as it is touched.

You can use this same method for identifying the location of food items on the individual's plate. As you are holding the utensil, have the individual put their hand over yours (or also on the utensil) and together move around the plate, gently poking and verbally labeling what and where food items are.

Use of Fork

Stabbing foods with a fork can be challenging. Certain foods such as peas and corn are difficult to pick up. Use a piece of bread, the butter knife or a spoon to push the loose food onto the fork. Use of a high-sided dish, a dish with spaced sections (also with high sides), or a bowl can be helpful as the side acts as a bumper when attempting to stab or get food onto a fork.

Use of Spoon

For some individuals use of a spoon to scoop the food can be the easiest and most efficient. This also depends upon the texture of the foods served.

For solid food, make sure the pieces are cut no bigger than the surface of the spoon. It may also be better to use a high-sided dish and/or small-sized bowls. For example, eating chopped salad is much easier to scoop from a small high-sided bowl than from a flat plate.

Use of Knife

Cutting foods can also be challenging. Try using the following grid method.

1. After determining the size of the item to be cut, place the fork close to the top left or right corner of the piece of food (left corner if right handed, and right corner if left handed).
2. Place the knife near the fork, orienting it so that cutting is in a left to right direction. Cut through left to right (or right to left) until the whole strip has been cut.
3. Cut the sections of each strip into bite-sized pieces, (now cutting in a top to bottom motion along the strip) using the outer edge of the strip as your guide to determine the size of the piece you cut.
4. Proceed to cut the next strip.
5. Repeat until done.

Dining (continued)

Posture

Ensuring that individuals are sitting comfortably when dining is very important. Some individuals tend to bend forward so that their head is close to the dining plate when eating. To assist individuals in this situation, raise the dining area by using a dining tray that sits 4 or more inches (depending upon the needs of the individual) up from the table.

Please consult with an Occupational Therapist for use of this or any other positioning devices.

Adaptive Dining Utensils / Cups

Please consult with an Occupational Therapist for assessment and recommendations for appropriate use of adaptive dining utensils and cups.

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See also MCB/DDS Partnership handouts:

- Sensitivity to Vision Loss: How to Best Assist a Person Who Has Vision Impairment
- Task Organization
- Creating a Safe Environment

For additional resources, please visit:

focusonvisionandvisionloss.org



*** Sources:**

1. Hart, Susan, "Dining Out Made Easier" from *Sharing Solutions*, Spring 2003: Lighthouse International
2. Lundy, Sue, "Developing Sensitivity Toward the Visually Impaired" from University of Illinois Eye Center: Eye Site