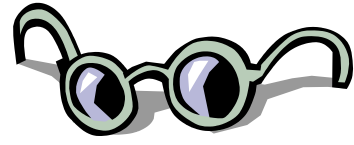


MCB/DDS Partnership

Orientation & Mobility/Low Vision Services
www.mass.gov/dds/visionloss



Dining: How to Assist Individuals with Vision Loss

Use of Color, Contrast and Lighting

For individuals with some vision, it can be very helpful to make sure that all items sitting on the table contrast in color from the table top. It is helpful to have available two sets of dishes and bowls--one light in color and one dark--so light colored foods are served on dark colored dishes and the reverse to more easily see the food and items. Use contrasting color place mats between the dishes and the table.



poor contrast



better contrast



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.

Verbal Description

Tell the person what and where items are located on the table as well as his plate. If the person understands what a clock looks like then using the "clock" analogy may be helpful.

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

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



Dining (continued)

Verbal Description (continued)

Or, use any other analogy that is meaningful to the person for describing where items are located.

Hand Over Hand

It may be helpful to gently hold the individual's hand in yours and assist him to slowly slide his hand across the table to identify the location of items on the table. Identify each item as he touches it.

You can use this same method for helping to identify the location of food items on the individual's plate. As he is holding onto his utensil, gently hold his hand in yours and 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 are difficult to pick up—peas, corn. A piece of bread, the butter knife or spoon can be used to push the loose food onto the fork. Use of a high sided dish or a dish with spaced sections (also with high sides) can be helpful as the side of the dish can be used as a bumper when attempting to stab or get food onto a fork.

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. Repeat until done.

Dining (continued)

Use of Spoon

For some individuals use of a spoon to scoop the food can be the easiest and most efficient utensil. 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 salad plate.

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.

Developed by*: Lisa DiBonaventura, M.A., COMS

* 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

Please also see MCB/DDS Partnership handouts:

- Lighting
- Glare
- Task Organization

For additional resources and on line links, please visit:

www.mass.gov/dds/visionloss