Protected mealtimes

Issued by Nutrition and Dietetic Service
**Introduction**

This information is for patients and visitors about how we make sure the nutritional needs of all patients are met. One of the ways we do this is through having protected mealtimes.

**“Right meal, right time, right help”**

The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) identified poor nutrition as a patient safety issue. The protected mealtimes initiative helps improve patient safety by making sure that patients receive the right meal at the right time with the right amount of help.

**What are protected mealtimes?**

Protected mealtimes are a period of time over lunch and supper when all non-urgent clinical activity stops and patients can enjoy their meals without interruption.

**Key principles of protected mealtimes**

- Making sure the patient is positioned in a way which is both comfortable and safe for them to eat their meal
- Making sure that the environment is such that it encourages patients to eat their meals
- Providing assistance and helping patients with their meal by helping them to eat or cut up food
- Observing / monitoring nutrition and fluid intake
- Discouraging anything that interferes with the meal and reduces the amount eaten.
Why do we need protected mealtimes?

Up to 40% of all patients admitted to hospital are undernourished. This percentage increases when patients have been in hospital for a week.

Malnutrition (when patients are undernourished)
• is under-recognised and under-treated in healthcare settings
• causes delays in patient recovery
• is linked to increased GP visits
• increases length and frequency of hospital stays.

Protected mealtimes allow patients to eat their meals without interruptions and nurses to focus on helping the patients.

How have protected mealtimes affected staff, visitors and relatives?

Protected mealtimes encourage a calm atmosphere where the main focus is serving appetising meals. This provides patients with uninterrupted time to eat and drink, which should be an enjoyable part of their treatment and necessary to help with their recovery.

Our staff work together to make sure the meal experience is put first. They help by encouraging patients to eat their meals in a relaxed and friendly environment and also assist patients with lids and cutlery as necessary.
A change for the better

Throughout the trust all inpatient wards and departments aim to implement protected mealtimes where possible. Patient safety remains the main priority and some clinical areas may be unable to protect mealtimes for all patients. Exceptions are made at the discretion of the nurse in charge and/or consultant under special circumstances.

How can you help?

You are still welcome to visit the patient over mealtimes if you are providing assistance to help the patient eat or drink. However, it would be helpful not to phone the wards over the mealt ime periods unless it is absolutely necessary.

When are the meals served?

The timing of meals across the trust varies within our different hospitals. For further information and specific times please speak to the ward staff or visit our website: www.northumbria.nhs.uk
Alternative Formats
If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118

Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices
www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)
www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)
Freephone: 0800 032 0202
Text: 01670 511098
Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
General Enquiries 03 44 811 8111
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