

Church Name

Jane Doe, RN, FCN

ASSISTING OLDER ADULTS WITH EATING & DRINKING

Occupational therapy is sometimes ordered to help impaired persons become more independent with activities of daily living, such as eating. If the older adult requires physical therapy and/or skilled nursing services, and is homebound (is usually unable to leave home without assistance), occupational therapy MAY be payable by Medicare or other primary insurance.

Tips for encouraging the older adult to maintain independence with eating:

- Provide a comfortable seating arrangement with a supportive chair, close enough to the table to make eating easy, and a table that is the proper height for eating, in relation to the chair. If the older adult is in a wheelchair, a lapboard may make it easier for him/her to get close enough to the food for independent eating.
- Provide heavy dishes that are less likely to slide around on the place mat. (If these do not provide sufficient stability, adaptive equipment, as detailed below, will help.)
- Use adaptive equipment*:
 - A plate guard for the older adult to push food against while trying to pick up food items.
 - Eating utensils with built up handles. These may be purchased or foam cylinders (such as foam curlers) can be slipped onto regular eating utensils. Alternately, a rubber bicycle grip can be slipped over the handle of a utensil.
 - Special angled spoons or forks are available for older adults with limited wrist or forearm motion.
 - A rocker knife makes it easier for older adults with one functional hand to cut food. Other helpful cutting devices include serrated knives and pizza cutters.
 - Plates with suction cups on the bottom to keep them in place.
 - A non-skid place mat.
 - A mug with a large handle may be easier to pick up than a regular cup or a glass.
 - A pen or pencil clip is a good straw holder. Slip the clip over the straw and hook it over the side of the glass. Long straws are available to facilitate drinking without picking up the glass.
 - Nose cutout cups make drinking easier for older adults who have limited neck motion.
- Assist with just those eating tasks that are most difficult, e.g., cutting meat, buttering bread.
- Encourage use of a spoon for hard-to-pick-up items such as peas.
- Provide a piece of bread to use as a “pusher” to facilitate picking up food items.
- Serve more finger foods.
- Help the visually impaired older adult locate each food item on the plate by describing the plate like the face of a clock.
- Provide a food warming dish to keep food warm if the older adult is a slow eater. (OVER)

If the older adult has difficulty swallowing he/she may choke easily on liquids. The physician may prescribe thickened liquids. (A packet of thickener is mixed into each glass of liquid.)

Tips for stimulating the appetite of the older adult:

- Offer his/her favorite foods.
- Offer small servings and nutritious snacks between meals.
- Make sure hot foods are hot and cold foods are cold.
- Provide an attractive arrangement of the food with contrasting colors.
- Arrange for the older adult to eat with the family as often as possible.
- Facilitate regular dental care. Dentures must fit well, and the older adult's mouth must be in good condition or his/her appetite can be adversely affected.

If it is necessary to feed the older adult:

- The older adult should be in as near a sitting position as possible, if confined to bed.
- Wash your hands.
- Explain to the older adult what you plan to do.
- Be sure dentures are in place.
- Protect clothing with a napkin.
- Test the temperature of hot foods.
- Offer small bites, giving the older adult a choice of which foods he/she prefers.
- Use a straw for liquids.
- Give the older adult time to chew and swallow. Do not rush him/her; instead, let him/her set the pace.
- Talk to the older adult while feeding him/her.
- Keep a washcloth handy for cleanup.
- When the meal is finished, wash the older adult's face and hands and perform or assist with oral hygiene. (See **Tip Sheet on Grooming.**)

* **Sources of adaptive equipment:** (NOTE: NOAH does not necessarily endorse any of these companies. Other sources may be found with a web or yellow pages search.)

Websites:

<http://www.disabilityproducts.com>

<http://www.wrightstuff.biz/>

<http://www.SammonsPreston.com>

<http://www.arthritissupplies.com/>

<http://www.allegromedical.com>

Local Home Medical Supply companies: Look in the yellow pages under Medical Equipment and Supplies or search online under Home Medical Supply Companies.