MEALTIME MANAGEMENT AND PROVIDING MEALS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to ensure suitably trained staff provide each consumer requiring mealtime management and support in the home nutritious meals of a texture that are appropriate to their individual and specific dietary and/or swallowing needs.

It aims to ensure meals are planned, prepared, and delivered in a manner that respects each consumer's cultural, religious, and personal food preferences, and meets their individual nutritional and care requirements. This approach means that Bilingual Care can provide safe, enjoyable meals that support healthy body weight, overall wellbeing, and quality of life.

This policy and procedure should be read in conjunction with Bilingual Care*'s Food Storage and Preparation Policy and Procedure* and *Food and Nutrition Policy and Procedure*. It applies to all staff and meets relevant legislation, regulations, and Standards.

All staff and health professionals are accountable for their own practice and must work within their professional scope, registration requirements, the *Aged Care Code of Conduct* and relevant clinical guidelines for safe mealtime management.

Applicable Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards

- *Standard 1. The Individual*
- *Standard 2. The Organisation*
- *Standard 3. The Care and Services*
- *Standard 6. Food and Nutrition*

Definitions

Dysphagia - difficulty with swallowing. Symptoms include:

- difficulty biting or chewing on food
- coughing or choking on food or fluids
- frequent throat clearing during or after swallowing,
- heartburn and regurgitation
- long mealtimes over 30 minutes
- food or drink falling from a person's mouth, and
- respiratory infection due to food aspiration.

Dysphagia is associated with a wide range of disabilities and health conditions, and symptoms can worsen as people get older, resulting in the need for mealtime management support..[1]

[1] NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission 2020, *Dysphagia, Safe Swallowing, and Mealtime Management Practice Alert*, Australian Government, Canberra.

Mealtime Management - refers to the strategies and support provided to ensure safe and effective eating and drinking. It involves two main approaches:

1. Providing nutritionally adequate and enjoyable meals for general purpose.
2. Addressing specific health needs such as difficulty swallowing (Dysphagia) and includes creating specialised meal plans. For those with Dysphagia, this can involve modified food and drink textures, specific positioning during mealtimes and supervision to prevent choking or aspiration.

A Mealtime Management Plan is required when a consumer has:

- **Swallowing difficulties (Dysphagia)** - where there is a risk of choking or aspiration. Note: Mealtime Management Plan can ONLY be written by an appropriately qualified health professional.
- **Texture-modified diet** - where food or drink must be thickened, pureed, minced or softened in line with IDDSI standards.
- **Allergies or intolerances** - where food restrictions are medically necessary to prevent harm.
- **Specialist dietary needs** - Diabetes Management, Renal diets or other medical nutrition plans prescribed by a health professional.
- **Behavioural or sensory issues** - structured mealtime routines, specific strategies to manage safety and well-being.

Nutrition – is taking in and using fuel in the body via eating and drinking, digestion, and absorption. Effective nutrition requires people having food and fluids that provide enough energy and key nutrients for growth and repair.

Swallowing Difficulty - difficulty swallowing foods or liquids, arising from the throat or oesophagus, ranging from mild difficulty to complete and painful blockage.

Texture-modified Foods and Fluids - meals or drinks that have been prepared in a way that creates a certain texture or consistency. They can make swallowing easier and potentially reduce the risk of choking or aspirating (inhaling food and water in the lungs). Texture-modified foods and fluids are often used to help people with dysphagia eat and drink safely. For more information relating to food modifications, refer to the Food Standards Australia New Zealand[2] and International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI)[3] websites.

Undernutrition - occurs when the body does not get enough energy or nutrients for good health or is unable to utilise energy or nutrients because of digestive problems or illness. Undernutrition (malnutrition) may result in starvation.

Policy

Bilingual Care is committed to supporting consumers to enjoy meals safely and with dignity, managing swallowing difficulties and nutritional risks appropriately, following health professional recommendations (e.g. Speech Pathologist, Dietician).

Bilingual Care will ensure staff are trained to implement mealtime management plans safely and consistently and respect individual choice, cultural background and dignity of risk.

Bilingual Care staff strive to provide meal services that involve the consumer as much as possible to maintain their independence and connection to their identity.

[2] https://www.foodstandards.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx
[3] https://iddsi.org/

Procedures

Roles and Responsibilities

Bilingual Care will ensure staff are suitably trained and support others involved in providing mealtime support to ensure each consumer receives meals that are nutritious, texture appropriate, planned and prepared to meet individual needs and preferences.

Bilingual Care will undertake regular satisfaction surveys to gauge the quality and safety of food delivered to improve on meal planning and meal delivery services provided, and encourage consumers to provide their feedback and complaints as per Bilingual Care's *Feedback and Complaints Policy and Procedure*.

The Clinical Advisor is responsible for:

- undertaking appropriate nutritional and meal support assessments, planning and reviews relating to mealtime services with the consumer and their supporters/representative, as required. For complex and emerging chronic health risks related to mealtime management support, the Clinical Advisor will engage qualified health professionals to undertake assessments, i.e. dysphagia, diabetes, food allergies, obesity, underweight to proactively manage identified risks and develop the required mealtime management plan.
- ensuring staff are trained in mealtime support, food handling, meal preparation and delivery, interventions for risks, labelling and storage of meals, including checking and safe delivery of pre-prepared meals.
- ensuring First Aid training of staff is kept up to date including any other necessary training, maintaining training records and monitoring compliance.
- ensuring correct equipment and resources (e.g. blenders, thickeners) made available to staff in collaboration with the consumer where required to prepare texture modified meals and drinks as per their *Mealtime Management Plan*.
- sourcing the required adaptive or modified utensils or feeding aids e.g. spoons, plates, cups, straws in collaboration with consumer to assist with meals, where identified.
- ensuring *Mealtime Management Plans* for consumers are made available where mealtime management is provided, and easily accessible for staff reference.
- coordinating with health professionals involved to adjust and update *Mealtime Management Plans*, as needed.

Staff are responsible for:

- following the required food handling, meal preparation and delivery procedures, risk identification, and actions to be taken for emergencies.
- ensuring consumers understand their *Mealtime Management Plan* by providing written information (in different languages as required) or explained verbally by staff, and
- supporting consumers to access interpreters or advocates as needed.

Mealtime Management Assessment, Planning and Review

Bilingual Care provides meals to consumers that are based on a thorough nutritional and meal support assessment undertaken by other service providers.

The Managing Director must engage with each consumer's multidisciplinary team to obtain this assessment or obtain copies of the assessment from each consumer, to ensure Bilingual Care provides meals that meet the nutritional and safety requirements for each consumer.

Mealtime Management and Care Plans

The above information (including risks identified) must be recorded in each consumer's *Care Plan* as a *Mealtime Management Plan* and communicated with all staff involved in the provision of meal services.

Each consumer's mealtime requirements must be summarised prominently in their *Care Plan*, so they are clearly identifiable for staff who plan, prepare, and deliver the consumer's meals. The Managing Director must ensure alerts or changes to consumers' *Mealtime Management Plans*, particularly with respect to food and fluids, are updated in their *Care Plan* and communicated to relevant staff as soon as they occur.

Care Plans must also include consumers' preferences regarding the level of staff intervention or support with eating and drinking, in addition to the level of involvement the consumer wishes to have (for example, assisting with meal preparation tasks).
Staff must:

- understand the *Mealtime Management Plans* of each consumer they support, and seek advice from the Managing Director should there be any uncertainty about the support required, or if further training is required to provide the necessary support
- ensure consumers and their support network understand their *Mealtime Management Plan* or are supported to understand it and
- provide *Mealtime Management Plans* to consumers and their support network in ways that suit their individual communication needs. Written information can be provided in different languages and Easy English or explained verbally by staff. Staff can also help consumers access interpreters or advocates where required.

As per Bilingual Care's *Initial Assessment and Care Planning Policy and Procedure* and *Care Review Policy and procedure*, *Care Plans*, including those containing *Mealtime Management Plans*, must be readily accessible to staff and consumers throughout service delivery.

Mealtime Management Plans and assessments relating to mealtime management and services must be reviewed as part of *Care Plan* reviews (at least annually), or:

- in accordance with the professional advice of the consumer's health practitioner or
- more frequently if needs change or difficulty is observed.

Service Delivery

Training

Prior to providing meal services, and depending on the type of meal service they are providing, staff supporting consumers with meal services must be trained in:

- food handling and preparation
- implementing *Mealtime Management Plans* or other recommendations for swallowing safely or mealtime management
- how to prepare and provide safe, enjoyable meals
- how to identify and respond to early signs and symptoms of dysphagia and how to support people with dysphagia to have safe and enjoyable meals
- the mealtime management needs of specific consumers and the steps to take if safety incidents occur during meals, such as coughing or choking on food or fluids
- specific consumer preferences and needs/goals for nutrition and hydration and
- proactively managing emerging and chronic health risks related to mealtime difficulties, including how to seek help to manage such risks.

Staff responsible for the provision of meal services are encouraged to further develop their culinary skills (meal planning, preparation, and presentation) with Bilingual Care's support (through professional development appropriate to their role) as this further adds to the positive dining and meal experience of the consumer.

Meal Planning

Bilingual Care undertakes the following types of meal planning with consumers:

- individual, one on one planning to identify meals staff will cook, or help consumers to cook, in their home
- and
- for pre-prepared meals that consumers can order for home delivery.

Staff responsible for meal services must plan menus in collaboration with consumers, so that meals provided:

- are nutritious and enjoyable
- reflect the consumer's preferences and informed choice and
- align with any recommendations by health practitioners that are included in the consumer's *Mealtime Management Plan*.

Planning should also support consumers who have chronic health risks (such as swallowing difficulties, diabetes, anaphylaxis, food allergies, obesity or being underweight) to proactively manage those risks.

Meal Preparation and Delivery

Meals must be provided in accordance with any *Mealtime Management Plan* in place, as well as the preferences of each consumer.

Staff must not prepare or deliver meals for consumers who do not have a documented *Mealtime Management Plan,* or for consumers who require modified meals or fluids and whose *Mealtime Management Plan* is not based on an assessment and advice from an appropriate health professional.

Where required, staff should consult with the Managing Director to seek additional support from consumers' health practitioners, to ensure they prepare and provide texture-modified foods and fluids appropriately and know how to check that meals are of the correct texture.

All meals must be presented in such a way that they are appealing visually, and texturally, and are familiar to each consumer.

Meals must also be of an appropriate quantity and prepared to a high quality, with plating and equipment provided that reflects the consumer's mealtime requirements (for instance, modified eating utensils provided where this has been recommended by an occupational therapist to support the consumer to eat independently).

To ensure delivered meals are meeting consumers' needs, Bilingual Care will undertake quarterly satisfaction surveys to gauge the quality and safety of the food being delivered. Results from these surveys will inform Bilingual Care's subsequent meal planning and delivery services.

Mealtime Interventions for Risks

All staff who are involved in meal preparation, delivery, or assistance must be aware of the risks involved for each consumer, the strategies to prevent them and interventions to implement should they occur. This information must be detailed in consumers' *Mealtime Management Plans* and be based on assessments and advice from consumers' multidisciplinary teams.

All consumers must be monitored when eating to enable staff to identify and respond to risks (such as choking or aspiration).

Staff are to respond to consumer's risks and implement strategies based on the consumer's *Mealtime Management Plan* and their scope of practice. Some health professionals have within their scope of practice the ability to increase food or fluid modification in response to a risk. For example, if a consumer were coughing while drinking fluids, an Managing Director could increase the fluid thickness temporarily until the consumer could be assessed by a speech pathologist. Agreed responses to mealtime risks must be based on attending staff members' scope of practice.

Should a consumer show any sign or symptom of swallowing difficulty, staff should support them to consult a GP and speech pathologist as soon as possible, for an assessment of their swallowing and mealtime needs, as well as review their general health. Appropriately trained staff should be available to monitor people with dysphagia during mealtimes.

In all cases, appropriate escalation processes must be included in all *Mealtime Management Plans* to support responses to consumer risks.

Should a mealtime risk or incident occur, staff must respond as per Bilingual Care's *Consumer Incident Management Policy and Procedure* and ensure the consumer's *Mealtime Management Plan* and *Care Plan* are immediately reviewed and updated.

Labelling and Storage

All meals prepared for consumer consumption should be labelled and stored in accordance with the guidance provided in Bilingual Care's *Food Storage and Preparation Policy and Procedure*.

Before delivering or serving a pre-prepared meal, staff must ensure the label on the consumer's meal matches the requirements set out in their *Mealtime Management Plan* and *Care Plan.*

Steps for Meal Delivery

1. Confirm the delivered meal is correct as per the consumer's *Care Plan*.
2. Verify labelling (allergens, use-by-dates).
3. Check food packaging, integrity and temperature.
4. Deliver meals / drinks to the consumer, safely and respectfully.
5. Report any concerns (e.g. incorrect meals, safety concerns) to the Clinical Advisor and do not leave them for the consumer to eat/drink if potentially unsafe. Determine

an alternative meal solution if required so the consumer is not left without meal requirements.

6. Document the food delivery and any consumer feedback.

Note: Delivered meals must only be ordered from approved Meal Suppliers that partner with both Support at Home / My Aged Care.

Steps for General Meal Preparation

1. Staff to plan and organise meals with the consumer, decide on meals considering their nutritional needs, budget and ingredients, including cultural, religious and personal food choices, and align with any recommendations from health professionals that are included in the consumer's *Mealtime Management Plan*.

2. Staff to check consumer's *Mealtime Management Plan* for the level of intervention required for mealtime support.

3. Shop and store purchased foods properly to maintain freshness and safety, separating cooked foods from uncooked foods and storing dry goods in a clean pantry. See Bilingual Care's *Food Storage and Preparation Policy and Procedure* for further guidance.

4. Identify meals that staff will cook or assist the consumer to cook. Involve the consumer, where able, to participate in meal planning and preparation.

5. Check date labels on foods before food preparation and discard any out-of-date food.

6. Ensure strict personal hygiene and safe food preparation hygiene and protocols.

7. Follow specific recipes and portion sizes to ensure nutritional needs are met.

8. Observe the consumer during meals for signs of distress or swallowing difficulties and report signs of distress to the Clinical Advisor immediately for follow up, as per the *Care Review Policy and Procedure*.

9. If a consumer chokes or experiences a medical emergency during a meal:
    - Call 000 immediately.
    - Provide First Aid within your level of training (choking response)
    - Notify the Clinical Advisor, GP, and the consumer's family/supporters as required and as per the consumer's *Mealtime Management Plan*.
    - Complete *Incident Report Form* and follow incident reporting procedures, as per the *Consumer Incident Management Policy and Procedure*, which may require Serious Incident Reporting Scheme (SIRS) notification.

10. Handle and dispose of waste safely to prevent cross contamination and wipe down all food preparation surfaces, leaving them clean and tidy.

Steps for Mealtime Management Support

1. Check *Mealtime Management Plan* and consent for Mealtime Management is current to eat and drink safely.

2. Always follow strict infection control and personal hygiene procedures, before during and after meal preparation and delivery.

3. Check step by step requirements for texture modification of meals / drinks as required, positioning strategies and monitoring needs as per the consumer's *Mealtime Management Plan* to avoid hazards, risks and adverse events.

4. Check the *Mealtime Management Plan* for the level of staff intervention required for mealtime support, engaging the consumer as best possible, and with their consent.

5. Do not prepare or deliver meals for consumers who don't have a documented *Mealtime Management Plan*.

6. Provide the required adaptive eating and drinking utensils as per *Mealtime Management Plan* for the consumer to eat independently where applicable.

7. Follow the *Mealtime Management Plan* closely, using prescribed procedures and techniques for textured food and fluid preparation, and to have the right consistency to make it easier to swallow. Where meals are pre-prepared, check food texture meets the texture modifications as set out in the consumer's *Mealtime Management Plan* before serving.

8. Before delivering or serving pre-prepared meals, check to ensure the label on the meal matches the requirements set out in the consumer's *Mealtime Management Plan*.

9. Serve meals in a way that looks appetising and appealing.

10. Always act with respect and kindness and never pressure or force a consumer to eat or drink.

11. Support the consumer to eat if needed (e.g. cutting up food, prompting, opening containers / bottles).

12. If a consumer chokes or experiences a medical emergency during a meal:
    - Call 000 immediately.
    - Provide First Aid within your level of training (choking response)
    - Notify the Clinical Advisor, GP, and the consumer's family/supporters as required and as per the consumer's *Mealtime Management Plan*.
    - Complete *Incident Report Form* and follow incident reporting procedures, as per the *Consumer Incident Management Policy and Procedure*, which may require Serious Incident Reporting Scheme (SIRS) notification.

13. Encourage oral hygiene after meals.

14. Report to the Clinical Advisor immediately when the consumer's eating and drinking needs change, they have difficulties swallowing, or other mealtime difficulties are observed.

15. Monitor the consumer's weight to track weight loss/gain and monitor temperature for signs of respiratory infection from aspiration as needed or where observed.

16. Maintain documentation in the consumer's case notes in Ezihealth of meals/drinks provided, what the consumer ate, any changes in meal intake and their health condition.

17. All meals prepared must be appropriately labelled and stored, as per the *Food Storage and Preparation Policy and Procedure*.

Steps for Preparing Texture Modified Foods

1. Wash hands thoroughly and wear gloves, as needed.

2. Ensure meals prepared and served according to *Mealtime Management Plan* and follow specific recipes and portion sizes for the desired texture.

3. Separate utensils and cutting boards for raw and cooked foods. Use correct equipment (e.g. blenders, thickeners) for texture modification.

4. Chop ingredients into smaller pieces before blending, as needed.

5. Cook foods till tender. Meats can be softened by simmering, braising or pressure cooking.

6. Check the final food temperature to ensure it is safe to serve, re-heat or re-chill after blending.

7. Keep meats, grains and vegetables separately on the plate for visual appeal and to be able to identify different food items.

8. ***Pureed (IDDS1-Level 4)*** - blend foods until smooth and lump free. Add liquid like broths, gravy or sauces for moisture and enhanced flavour to achieve required texture. Strain as necessary to remove skins or seeds. Use a measuring cup to determine volume and ensure accurate portioning. Always prepare one or two extra servings in case some food is lost during preparation, to account for any potential loss.

9. ***Minced and Moist (IDDSI -Level 5)*** - chop cooked, tender meat into pieces no larger than 4mm. Shred meat with a fork before adding back into a sauce or gravy. The food should be moist and holds its shape on a spoon.

10. ***Mechanical Soft*** - mash or chop food until it can be easily mashed with a fork. The food should be moist to form a bolus (round soft mass).

11. Avoid blandness - use stock, yoghurt or milk, not just water for moisture (without compromising allergies).

12. Increase variety - vary sauces and flavours for taste; roasting vegetables can enhance flavours.

13. Use presentation techniques to make food more visually appealing to eat and texturally familiar to the consumer.

14. Store prepared meals safely as per health standards including labelling and dated (all expired food must be discarded) as per the *Food Storage and Preparation Policy and Procedure*.

15. Seek input and feedback from the consumer in exploring ways to enjoy their mealtimes.

Supporting Documents

Documents relevant to this policy and procedure include:

- *Infection Control Policy and Procedure*
- *Initial Assessment and Care Planning Policy and Procedure*
- *Care Review Policy and procedure*
- *Consumer Case Notes Policy and Procedure*
- *Food Storage and Preparation Policy and Procedure*
- *Food and Nutrition Policy and Procedure*
- *Mealtime Management Plans*
- *Care Plans*
- *IDDSI Framework for texture modified foods and thickened fluids.*

Monitoring and Review

This Policy and Procedure will be reviewed at least annually by the Leadership Team. Reviews will incorporate staff, consumer, and other stakeholder feedback.

Bilingual Care's *Continuous Improvement Plan* will be used to record improvements identified and monitor the progress of their implementation. Where relevant, this information will be considered as part of Bilingual Care's service planning and delivery processes.

DOCUMENT CONTROL

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