Finger food is an idea that has been around for a long time. Many people with advanced dementia, who can no longer use utensils, are able to feed themselves if they have finger food they like, presented to them in an encouraging way by staff or family members. Being fed by someone else is often an uncomfortable and sometimes embarrassing experience, and can cause people to further lose interest in eating. While not everyone is able to benefit from finger food, those who can often take more interest in eating, and sometimes find it easier to take meals in the social setting of the dining room. And, if some residents need less assistance with eating, staff is free to concentrate more on those who are not able to help themselves.

Ariane Stein, a dietitian in France specializing in Alzheimer’s and gerontology, has done some interesting research on the use of finger foods, and gave us some new ideas about how to make them more appealing to residents. In addition to the carrot sticks, pieces of fruit, crackers, small muffins and sandwiches we all think of as finger food, Mrs. Stein experimented with taking traditional French dishes such as casserole of beef, veal stew, pork with lentils, even rice pudding, and preparing them as finger food. There are few things as comforting as familiar foods and tastes, so imagine macaroni and cheese, lasagna, your favorite chicken dish, or pumpkin pie as finger food!

Proof in the pudding

Mrs. Stein did her research in a nursing home in the Dordogne region of France, Le Verger Des Balans, with support from Dr. Genevieve Demoures. The purpose of the study was to show that nutritionally balanced, visually appealing, easy to pick up food could provide residents with Alzheimer’s the ability to feed themselves and be more independent.

Over the course of a year, Mrs. Stein worked with 20 residents—long enough to assess the impact of the approach and the recipes she developed. Ten residents were consistently fed by a caregiver at the start of the study, nine of whom improved to the point where they needed only partial assistance, or very limited assistance. The other ten residents started the study needing some assistance, and all of them improved to the point where they needed less help (thus giving staff more time to help others).

This is both compelling, and consistent with what we have known to be good practice for many years. What is new here is Mrs. Stein’s creation of recipes that are interesting, comforting and familiar to residents, as well as nutritionally balanced.

In keeping with the MDS-3 and its increased emphasis on responding to resident preference, the task is to learn more about foods that the resident enjoys through observation, trying out different types, and talking with family and friends. Mrs. Stein has successfully worked with Dietary Departments in France to develop programs that integrate nutritionally balanced meals with resident preferences and overall plans of care. The rewards are the pleasure taken in eating, greater dignity, improved nutritional status, and the opportunity for staff to focus more of their time on residents who are unable to help themselves.

(more)
As the study results also underscore, it is essential that residents not be given a diet of finger food while they are still able to use cutlery. The use of fingers to consume food is a natural progression of Alzheimer’s disease. As with all other aspects of care, staff will need to evaluate, step by step, what works best for each individual resident, in terms of their preference and comfort.

For more information about the program she has developed, Mrs. Stein can be contacted at arianebordeaux@gmail.com.

Article adapted from the Alzheimer’s Association New York City Chapter. Special thanks to original author, Ann Wyatt, Residential Care Policy & Strategy Consultant.

UPCOMING EVENTS & RESOURCES

JOIN US!

UPCOMING EVENTS & RESOURCES

JOIN THE MOVEMENT

Did you know Ohio businesses lose more than $3 billion annually in lost productivity and health care costs due to Alzheimer’s and related dementias? The time is now to find a cure. You can rally behind the cause with the Walk to End Alzheimer’s this fall!

Saturday, September 14, 2014 at Holden Arboretum in Kirtland
Saturday, September 21, 2014 at Metroparks Zoo in Cleveland
Saturday, September 28, 2014 at All Pro Freight Stadium in Avon

Sign up at www.alz.org/cleveland

Create a Walk Team!

Easy & quick ways to FUNdraise:

- Sell Malley’s candy bars for $1 each at work and around town.
- Go casual for the cause! Sell “Casual for a Cause” stickers and take a break from business clothes while raising money! Order your free stickers: www.alz.org/casualforacause
- Sell Forget-Me-Not paper flowers for $1 to honor loved ones.
- Put out change jars and host Penny Wars between departments.
- Offer a day off work to those who raise $100 for the team.

Become a Walk Sponsor starting at only $250!

By sponsoring a walk, your company’s logo will be placed on Walk t-shirts, website and signage.

For more about sponsorships, contact Sheryl Berman at sberman@alz.org or 216.342.5566.

why we fight

Walk teams share why they fight Alzheimer’s

Team: Embassy Healthcare

Embassy Healthcare is committed to providing quality care in a comfortable and nurturing environment. The Embassy Healthcare team is motivated by their residents for whom they provide emotional, physical and medical support. From walking tacos to fun activities, Embassy Healthcare raised money for the cause through employees, family members and the community support. The team was comprised of 60 individuals from 9 Embassy Healthcare facilities in the Cleveland area who collectively raised $7,947 for the Walk to End Alzheimer’s. In addition, Embassy Healthcare supported the Walk as a Bronze Level Sponsor.

Team: Arden Courts

At Arden Courts of Westlake, memory care is all we do, and it’s also our motivation to raise money for the Alzheimer’s Association. On a daily basis we see first-hand how this disease affects both the individuals with memory loss and their families. Our staff and past and present families all have the common goal of hoping to find a cure for this disease. Until then, we will strive to be the best at caring for the individuals with memory loss and raising money for the cause.

We were very honored to be first place in the healthcare division, especially since we are not a large facility. Our 26-member team raised $8,073. The rain did not—and will never—dampen our spirits and our drive.

Advanced Care is a free newsletter published by the Alzheimer’s Association, Cleveland Area Chapter for individuals who work in nursing homes and other residential care settings. If you would like multiple copies to pass out to your staff, please email ckanetsky@alz.org.