

# Engaging Tastebuds and Empowering Residents: Food Tastings as a Novel Nutrition Intervention in Long-Term Care

Isabel Huang, Sheila Novek PhD



## Introduction

Food dissatisfaction in long-term care

**20x** increased risk of malnutrition (1)

Canadian Long-Term Care Standards recommend engaging residents in menu planning as best practice (2). **How do we do this?**

### A Novel Approach: Food Tastings

#### What is it?

Different food options are critiqued by residents to engage them in menu planning.

#### How did we study this?

We observed this practice in a care home while doing a larger study on engagement in long-term care.

**Knowledge gap:** While a few articles and reports have discussed food tastings in care homes as a social activity, **no research has examined food tastings as a nutrition intervention in long-term care.**

## Purpose

- 1) Describe the origin, environment, and process of food tastings
- 2) Discuss the strengths and limitations as a nutrition intervention

## Methods



**Study Site:** faith-based, non-profit long-term care home in Winnipeg with approx. 150 residents.

### Field Observations

3 food tastings  
6 resident and family council meetings

### Semi-Structured Interviews

8 residents  
7 family members  
9 staff members

Food tasting comments coded and analyzed

## References

1. Sahin G, Caferoglu Z. The food service quality and its effects on nutritional status in nursing home residents. *Clinical Nutrition ESPEN*. 2022 Feb;47:233-9.
2. National Standards of Canada. HSO Long-Term Care Services (2023) Available online.
3. Slettebo Å, Saeteren B, Caspary S, Lohne V, Rehnsfeldt AW, Heggstad AKT, et al. The significance of meaningful and enjoyable activities for nursing home residents' experiences of dignity. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*. 2016 Dec 2;31(4):718-26.

## Findings

### Origin

After a resident voiced dissatisfaction about the bacon quality, the home invited a group of residents to taste-test different bacon products.

*"there was still a debate about the bacon, and how it tastes, and things like that. So I said, you know what? Let's have a tasting, a bacon tasting." (Staff)*

### Physical and Social Environment

The staff curated a pleasant physical environment.

Residents were seated around a dining table set with a tablecloth and dinnerware.



Staff members plated and served food to residents in a manner that evoked restaurant service.

6-8 residents were present at each tasting, with 2-5 staff members joining in.

Laughter and casual conversation were observed between staff and residents.

### Participatory Process

Residents and staff tasted the same food together.

*"[A resident] was having a little bit of trouble [...] in those cases, there was a staff person right beside them that said, [...] did you like that one more than the last one? Yes, or no?" [...] that was kind of how they helped out." (Staff)*

Staff members asked each resident for their opinion on food options.

*"Now, I would say it's good bacon." (Resident)*

Discussions often expanded to other food concerns.

Residents felt empowered seeing their feedback lead to tangible change.

## Study Limitations

We studied food tastings at one care home in Winnipeg. Feasibility and impact may differ in other locations or care models.

Although we hypothesize that food tastings could benefit residents with cognitive disabilities, their experiences were not specifically studied.

## Discussion

### Strengths

*"I think it makes me feel that I've contributed something [...] I want to do as much as I can to improve it for the residents." (Resident)*

Food tastings provide an enjoyable, empowering experience, addressing the need to develop activities that promote joy for residents living in care (3).

Residents and staff tasting food together encouraged a collaborative staff-resident dynamic.

The sensory experience of tasting food and the opportunity to give immediate feedback can make participation easier for residents with cognitive disabilities.

### Limitations

Participation was limited to a small group of residents.

Food tastings primarily focused on regular diet meals. Only one tasting for modified diets was held.

## Conclusion

Food tastings are a promising approach to offer residents a supportive and inclusive environment for food-related decision-making.

### Further research is needed to:

- Explore how food tastings complement other methods of gathering food feedback in care homes.
- Examine how food tastings work in different care home environments.