



What's Really on the Menu?

How to run a Hospital Food Taste Test Program.

Introduction

The goal of a Hospital Food Taste Test Program is to draw attention to the importance of food and nutrition in the health and recovery of patients. We also want staff to consider their role in encouraging and supporting patients to eat.

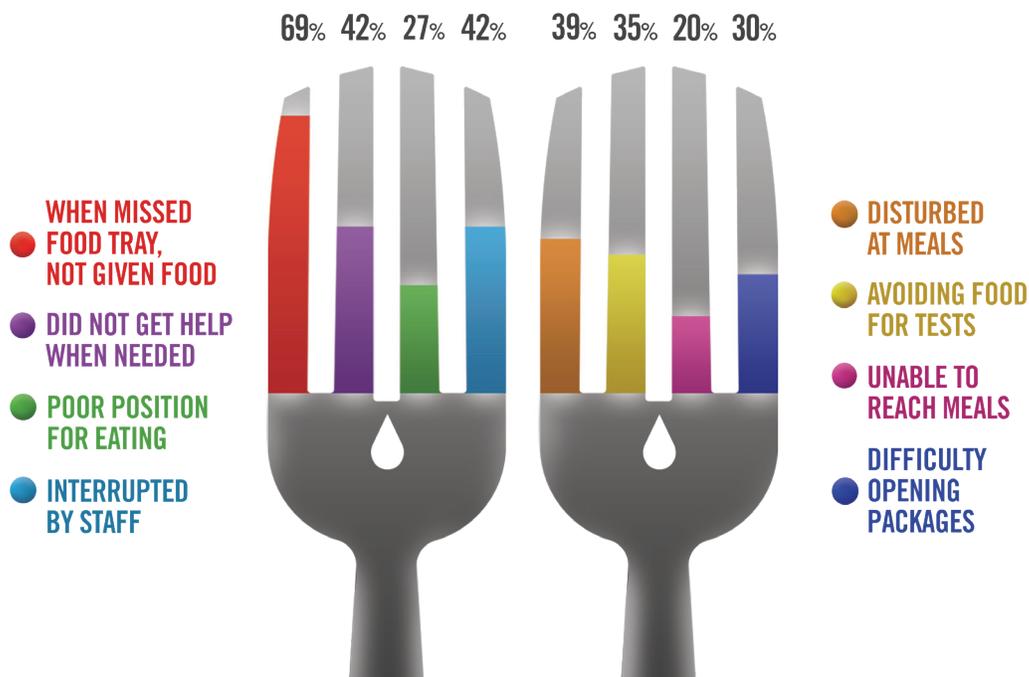
This program tackles the perception of hospital food within hospital culture. Stories and old jokes affect our behavior in many ways—from how we talk to patients about food, to how much effort we put into ensuring patients eat their meals.

Challenging our perceptions

Today's hospital food doesn't live up to the old jokes. It tastes better than people think. It's time to challenge our perceptions and change hospital culture by telling new stories. It's time for the taste test.

This program isn't trying to prove that all hospital food tastes good. Our goal is to encourage hospital staff to taste and understand what food is being served—what is actually good and, on a factual basis, participate in a discussion on what needs to become better.

Most importantly, we want staff to become more engaged with patients and supportive at mealtimes. As the chart below shows, patients need that help and the solutions are simple.



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Setting up a taste test

This is an exercise in changing culture and behavior. While this sounds serious, we encourage you to inject fun into the process. It is easier to shift beliefs and start open discussions when we are smiling.

Taste test activity can be informal, with small groups or individuals who choose to explore hospital food on their initiative, or be more formal and hospital wide initiatives. Either way, we encourage you to use the supplied posters and promotional tools.

If you wish to launch a more formal taste test initiative, here are some tips and best practices to follow:

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| Who | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Programs should be driven collaboratively by the hospital dietitians, food service staff, and unit managers. The objective is to provide an easy and structured way for front line staff (who engage with patients at meal time) to sample and gain first hand knowledge of food being served. |
| How | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Create a standard sample menu that is reflective of the average meals being served and is easy to manage.■ Via internal communications, or printed menus, allow staff to select a minimum of three meals over a 5-day period.■ Provide nutritional value information with each menu item■ Use the provided survey as a way for people to rank the food. It keeps things simple and fun. E.g. rankings used are: could use some flavor, better than expected, actually pretty good!■ Record items that score high and who ranked them that way. Set up a “staff picks” menu for each floor/ward which lists items staff thought were pretty good. Promote these items on patient menus as “Jane’s pick” etc. Make it fun. |

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- Promote**
- Use the promotional items we've created...and feel free to create your own fun ways to bring attention to your taste test program.
 - Special attention should be given to ensuring the Table Manners Guide poster or menu card is used and discussed with front line staff.
- Engage**
- Cultural change is hastened when senior management is enlisted in the program. Engage the executive level of your hospital and lobby them to participate in the taste test. Imagine the profound, and fun impact of the CEO's picks on a menu seen by staff and patients.
- Follow up**
- Do the follow up work of collecting and recording survey results and other forms of anecdotal feedback.
 - Report the findings to your own staff. Determine how you are going to use this information, and an engaged staff, to improve the quality of food, how its presented and how staff engage with patients at meal time.