



## Making Meals a Social Experience

*Ideas leading up to, during and after a meal, to make it a social experience - not just another routine in the day.*

**Before lunch** - A key part of the Butterfly Approach is to stimulate people's interest leading up to the meal. Here are some ideas to think about.



- Singing
- Looking at and discussing foods
- Thinking about the smells that stimulate appetite – fried onions or spices, cinnamon, fresh bread etc.
- Having a short walk outside or just around the block can be a nice way to get some exercise before a meal
- Preparing vegetables – even if people don't want to get involved themselves, watching someone else
- Peeling and chopping can trigger memories and conversations
- Looking at recipe cards or recipe books, or discussing the day's menu and likes and dislikes
- Theming the experience brings variety and fun - colours, time of year, special events, hats
- Creating the centre pieces for the tables
- Preparing the vases for the tables with flowers in
- Laying up the tables and folding serviettes



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**During lunch** - this is a really special time and an opportunity to get to know someone better through conversation and dining with them.



- Conversation cards on the table e.g. 'Did you have any pets when you were young?' 'What is your favourite food when you are dining out at a restaurant?' etc. Remember to share your own stories to get conversations started.
- Pictures on the table work well - they can be seasonal, of famous people; breed of dogs/cats, horses; famous sports people or film stars, etc... The list is endless and can be added to and used time and time again. Pictures can be obtained from the internet and laminated. Last year's photograph calendar pictures, for example of places or garden birds, are a good size.
- Interesting objects work well and create conversation, especially if it is a 'mystery' object and you have to try and guess what it is used for :)
- Remember visual choices of food create interactions, too – 'Would you prefer the blackcurrant drink or the lemonade?' 'Do you like beef or chicken?' Show both to help make the choice meaningful, rather than just a verbal option.
- Music in the background creates a relaxing atmosphere and avoids the sound of knives and forks on plates. Please ask people what music they would like, and know the things that individuals wouldn't like. Generally fast and very loud music at lunch time is to avoided, but it will depend on the mood!
- Look at photographs of significance to individuals from their life stories and show interest in these. Your own pictures work well, too. I have brought my wedding album in before and people loved it. Bring in a photograph of your favourite pet, a new grandchild or a recent holiday and share a memory or a story.
- Seasonal items work well, i.e. conkers, acorns, perhaps shells, as long as no possibility of ingesting.
- Seasonal place mats can also be made from pictures from the internet, of spring, Christmas etc. and then laminated.
- A mini quiz on the table - perhaps 6 questions for people to think about.
- News of the day can take place at lunch time, perhaps cutting snippets of news out for people to discuss.
- Wear something that you can talk about or that will encourage people to ask about, for example a bright flower, a hat, an unusual piece of clothing. The choices are endless.



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**After lunch** - This should not be a rushed experience but relaxed and take as long as it takes.



- Encourage people to perhaps move to a more comfortable area where they can enjoy beverages and continue chatting or remain at the table and bring some new things out to keep people's interest.
- Again this is about creating a relaxed and homely feel to the whole experience. always having time to chat and just 'be'.
- This could lead into perhaps a massage or fingernail painting.
- Looking at books about aeroplanes/boats or gardening
- Bring out the chocolates or another treat to serve with coffee or tea
- A game of chess or cards
- Stroll around the garden perhaps, if warm enough
- Return to some of the ideas from the 'before lunch' list
- What I am trying to say is that the mealtime experience doesn't just end there. It ideally leads onto other activities, and this in turn encourages people to remain in the more social areas. Many of these ideas would be equally relevant to breakfast or an evening meal, although you would of course vary the items on the table - for example, at breakfast, you might have cereal packets, jams, fresh fruits and yoghurts, with plenty of visual choices.

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