

CONGREGATE NUTRITION PROGRAM MYTH BUSTERS

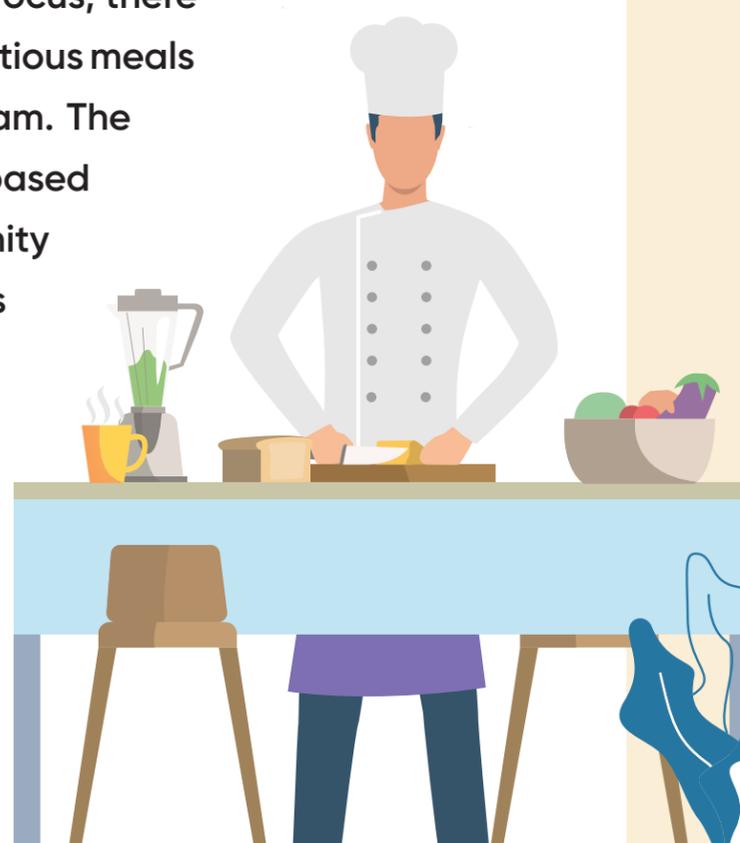
To ensure optimal client-centered service delivery



Participating in congregate nutrition programs for older adults can be fun, engaging and nutritionally satisfying. In fact, the core goals of the program – a nutritious meal, nutrition education, and an opportunity for socialization – are exactly what participants are looking for! There are many strategies that encourage client participation and creativity among program staff, and a multitude that are scalable to a variety of sites and meal types. Yet there may be some hesitation when seeking to adopt new practices if staff are unsure whether or not they are allowed under the rules of the Older Americans Act. This brief provides policy myths and facts when it comes to improving the dining experience for older adults. Below are just a few to consider, some of which may or may not be possible or relevant to your particular program.

MYTH Congregate nutrition programs should focus exclusively on providing a meal.

FACT While providing nutritious meals may be the central focus, there are actually several priorities – which include access to nutritious meals and socialization – within the congregate nutrition program. The opportunity for older adults to gain access to evidence-based health and wellness education in addition to vital community services are integral pieces of the program. This allows programming that not only encourages attendance but also participation. Opportunities for stimulating conversation, ways to challenge one’s mind and ideas to be physically active are all encouraged. For example, some sites offer dance classes, while others may offer bridge games or health-related classes.



MYTH Only one type of meal can be offered at a specific time, and older adults must be served the complete meal.

FACT While there's been a focus on serving lunch time, any meal – breakfast, lunch or dinner – can be served to congregate meal participants. Congregate nutrition programs can set not only the meal type, but also the time of day and length of the meal allowing more flexibility for attendees. In addition, although meals must meet set nutrition requirements, participants can select a la carte what items he/she would like to eat. Just because it's served doesn't mean it must end up on a participant's plate.



MYTH No program leftover meals are allowed home from the congregate meal site.



FACT While states have specific requirements on take-out meals, program leftover meals are allowed home with participants. Senior nutrition program staff should follow proper food storage and handling techniques and should educate clients about safe food handling practices to use when they are at home.

MYTH There is only one way to assess the meal's nutrition requirements to meet congregate meal requirements.

FACT Congregate meals must follow the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and provide a minimum of one-third of the Dietary Reference intakes. Additionally, each State Unit on Aging is able to set additional nutrition standards to meet the needs of their older adult population. Both MyPlate and the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension eating patterns can be used as a guide to adhere to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.



To learn more about these best practices and to get additional ideas and inspiration on how to implement new ideas at your congregate meal site, check out these key resources:

National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs

nanasp.org

National Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging

nutritionandaging.org

NRCNAengage – a networking platform for senior nutrition programs

nrcna.mn.co

