



Policy
Mealtime Management

Endorsed by: General Manager

Document Owner: Support Services

Section 1: Preamble

Goulburn Options is committed to ensuring that each participant requiring mealtime management is provided with meals which are of high quality, nutritious and of a texture that is appropriate to their individual needs.

Goulburn Options will ensure that meals are appropriately planned and meet participants' needs and preferences, including dietary intolerances, allergies, and medication contraindications. Goulburn Options is committed to providing participants with meals which support nutrition, hydration, and good health.

Goulburn Options is committed to developing the capacity of each participant to exert control and independence over the choice, creation, intake and storage of their own meals wherever possible.

Section 2: Policy Statement

2.1 Intake

As part of our intake process, Goulburn Options will identify all participants who have mealtime management requirements, including any difficulty with swallowing, and any allergies. Goulburn Options will consult with the participant and/or their representative to determine any mealtime management needs.

If a participant has a diagnosis or condition requiring high-intensity mealtime management supports (e.g. PEG, dysphagia) Goulburn Options will work with relevant medical and allied health professionals to enact those individual participant's speciality mealtime management plans as per GO policy and relevant practice standards.

Goulburn Options will also ensure that workers look out for potential signs and symptoms of mealtime risk in participants, including:

- difficult, painful chewing or swallowing;
- coughing, choking, or frequent throat clearing during or after swallowing;
- having long mealtimes e.g. finishing a meal takes more than 30 minutes;
- becoming short of breath when eating and drinking;
- avoiding some foods because they are hard to swallow;
- regurgitation of undigested food;
- difficulty controlling food or liquid in their mouth;
- drooling;
- having a hoarse or gurgly voice;
- having a dry mouth;

- poor oral hygiene;
- frequent heartburn;
- unexpected weight loss; and
- frequent respiratory infections.

2.2 Assessment

Each participant who is identified as requiring mealtimes management will have their individual needs assessed by an appropriately qualified health practitioner. Generally,

- A dietician (if involved) is responsible for assessing nutritional status and providing individually adapted nutritional advice on a participant's meal plan.
- A speech pathologist (if involved) is responsible for assessing individuals with feeding, eating, drinking, and swallowing difficulties.
- An occupational therapist (if involved) is responsible for assessing individuals who have difficulty with feeding due to a physical, cognitive, or psychological disability. The OT can suggest adaptations, techniques, positioning and/or aids and equipment to facilitate and maintain independence.

Goulburn Options will support the facilitation of this referral/assessment process in partnership with the participant and/or nominee, or support coordinator where relevant.

Goulburn Options understands that qualified health practitioners complete the following processes for participants:

- undertake comprehensive assessments of their nutrition and swallowing;
- assess their seating and positioning requirements for eating and drinking;
- provide mealtimes management plans which outline their mealtimes management needs, including for swallowing, eating, and drinking; and
- review assessments and plans annually or in accordance with the professional advice of the participant's practitioner, or more frequently if needs change or difficulty is observed.

Participants will be involved in the assessment and development of their mealtimes management plans.

Menus will be developed for each participant as part of mealtimes management planning to ensure participants are provided with meals that are:

- nutritious;
- enjoyable;
- reflective of their preferences (personal and cultural/religious);
- reflective of their informed choice; and
- reflective of any recommendations made by an appropriately qualified health practitioner, that are included in their mealtimes management plan.

Goulburn Options will ensure that each worker responsible for providing mealtimes management to a participant has access to that participant's mealtimes management plan at all times.

2.3 Worker Responsibilities

Workers at Goulburn Options will prepare and provide texture-modified foods and fluids in accordance with the mealtime management plans for participants.

Workers are to check that meals for participants are of the correct texture, as identified in their plans.

Workers at Goulburn Options who provide mealtime management, will be responsible for understanding the needs of participants, and the steps to take if safety incidents occur during meals, such as coughing or choking on food or fluids.

During mealtimes, workers will support participants as required, in accordance with their mealtime support plans, through measures including:

- supporting participants to maintain a safe body position (this may include repositioning the participant during the meal);
- providing specific mealtime assistance techniques, including any reminders about a safe rate of eating, or a safe amount of food in each mouthful;
- responding to coughing or choking and making sure risks are monitored while a person is eating or drinking; and
- providing appropriate eating and drinking aids where required.

2.4 Worker Training

Goulburn Options will ensure that each worker who provides mealtime management to participants is provided with training in the preparation and provision of safe and enjoyable meals.

Workers will also be trained in the proactive management of emerging and chronic health risks related to mealtime difficulty, including how to seek help to manage these risks.

Workers will be trained in how to respond if a participant starts to choke during mealtimes, and when to call an ambulance.

2.4 Food Storage and Labelling

Meals to be provided to participants will be stored safely and in accordance with health standards.

Meals for participants requiring mealtime management will be clearly labelled so as to be identified as a meal to be provided to a particular participant and differentiated from meals to be provided to other participants.

2.5 Food Safety and Appropriate Food Handling

All workers responsible for food preparation and/or handling will receive adequate training and be aware of relevant food handling and preparation procedures and comply with all applicable food safety standards.

Please see Routine Health and Safety Procedures Policy for further information.

2.5 Non-Prescribed Assistance/General Mealtimes Support

Where Goulburn Options supports participants who do not require formalised and/or allied health mealtimes management support (e.g., do not require a mealtimes management plan) the person-centred principles of mealtimes support previously outlined in this policy still apply.

Section 3: Roles

Role	Responsibilities and Accountabilities
Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure the policy aligns with Goulburn Options' strategic goals and provides oversight of its implementation.
Executive Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure the implementation of the policy across all areas of the organization and allocate necessary resources.
Team Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that workers are aware of and follow the mealtimes management policy and provide any needed guidance and support.
Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure proper documentation and record-keeping of mealtimes management plans, assessments, and training.
Workforce (<i>DSW, Students, Volunteers</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare and provide meals in accordance with the mealtimes management plans, provide assistance during mealtimes, and ensure food is stored properly.
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively engage in their mealtimes management planning, share relevant information, and follow the mealtimes plans developed for them.

Section 4: Related Documentation

Document Name	Document Type
Participant Intake Forms (Part A) and (Part B)	Forms
Mealtimes Management Plan	Plan
Support Plan	Plan
Risk Assessment	Form
Health Management	Policy
Individual Planning and Outcomes	Policy
Participant Intake and Onboarding	Procedure

Section 5: Definitions

Term	Definition
Dysphagia	Difficulty swallowing, which may require specific mealtimes management and interventions.
PEG (Percutaneous Endoscopic Gastrostomy)	A medical procedure involving a tube inserted through the abdomen to deliver nutrition directly to the stomach.
Texture-Modified Foods	Foods that have been altered in texture (e.g., pureed, chopped, or minced) to meet the specific needs of a participant.

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