Mealtimes Checklist

Consider the environment

Is there a lot of distractions where the person will be eating? Consider stimuli, does this need to be reduced or increased during mealtimes? You could complete an environmental audit.

Consider sensory needs

Mealtimes can present a range of sensory challenges that may lead to heightened anxiety. You may need to offer support to help the person feel calm. You may achieve this by giving some proprioceptive input. An example of this can be providing the individual with a wobble cushion.

Consider seating

If the person struggles with their proprioceptive system, sitting on a chair at a table could be distressing as they may have difficulties keeping themselves upright. Or they may feel as though their feet are a long way off the ground.

Think about adaptations

Things such as weighted cutlery or plate dividers could make mealtimes easier for the person.

One new food at a time

Offering familiar food on the plate alongside new food can give the person some comfort and familiarity.

Consider food appearance

For some people, their identification of threat may be based on colour. Having brightly coloured foods on their plate could be distressing. Also, consider the portion size- having too much food on the plate can be equally overwhelming.

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Visuals

Consider using visual prompts for mealtimes or having a list of clear visual rules for mealtimes. Also, giving the person a visual choice board so they can pick their meals may be and promotes independence.

Transition Tools

Is the transition to mealtimes difficult for the person? If they are in the middle of a chosen activity and must stop, this may cause some distress. They may begin to resent mealtimes because it interrupts them. Consider using transition tools such as a sand timer to countdown the time until their activity ends.

Make it fun

Can the person help with the cooking? Can they become a food scientist and experiment with trying different foods? Can you cut their food into fun shapes or use character foods such as Disney spaghetti/hoops?

Consistent mealtimes

Having set mealtimes can create predictability for a person. Regular eating schedules can also improve a person's health and will train their body clock to recognise things such as hunger.