

NOURISHING PATIENTS FOR FASTER RECOVERY

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My Role: I'm a registered dietitian and I focus on ensuring patients maintain optimal nutrition and hydration status. This is crucial for anyone in long term care, but especially for those who have COVID-19.

COVID-19 patients who require ventilation are unable to consume food and require nutrition support, which include tube feeding.

Symptoms of the virus -including elevated temperature, abnormal bowel movements, respiratory distress and lethargy- can compromise a nutrition and impact recovery. To combat that, we encourage, treat and educate patients when possible to consume foods that are calorically

dense, immune boosting and appropriate for them. The virus also causes high temperatures, so we make sure patients have adequate fluid intake to keep them cool.

Impact of COVID-19: When COVID-19 started, a new dietitian and I were the only nutrition staff here for almost four weeks. Normally, we would have 10 to 20 patients daily. During the surge, we were seeing 70 new patients a day.

First, I was petrified and scared. It was overwhelming, and I would think, "when is this going to end?" Then it became the norm, so I pulled up my socks and went in.

I worked closely with physicians, because they were very busy and we still had to make orders for additional fluids and supplies.

Why I'm on the frontlines: I signed up to make sure people are healthy, nourished and get well. The desire to care for people is innate, and it's just something within you.

COVID-19 is so unpredictable in how it affects people, especially those with underlying health conditions like diabetes. That's what dietitians target. Dietitians work closely with a multidisciplinary clinical team and, when possible, we work directly with the patient, to sustain and maintain a good nutritional status.

The need for nutrition support becomes more crucial for patients who aren't ventilated. These patients often require supplemental oxygen, which can make it difficult to consume adequate nutrition. Early nutrition interventions have been proven to aid in reducing recovery time, so it's important for me to be here.

