

# Guideline E7:

## Assisting a person to eat and/or drink

**Remember - carers are twice as likely as people in most other professions to injure their backs through moving and handling activities. To help minimise these risks always consider the following guidance before you assist a person to eat or drink:**

<b>Self help</b>	An occupational therapist (OT) may be able to advise on adapted cutlery, crockery etc to assist people to eat independently.
<b>Ergonomics</b>	Well designed seating and tables will help to reduce postural strain e.g. front support chairs, adjustable height tables.
<b>Communication</b>	Always check how the person wishes to be assisted and consult their handling plan.
<b>Safety</b>	Check the environment is safe e.g. clear and free from obstructions. Avoid prolonged fixed postures especially leaning forward and twisting.

### Preparation

1. Check individual care plans for guidance on eating and drinking.
2. Check any specific guidance from therapists e.g. speech and language therapists, OTs or physiotherapists.
3. Ensure that correct seating, table and other equipment is available e.g. adapted cutlery, crockery, pillows/cushions (to provide support where necessary).
4. Take any necessary steps to ensure the person's dignity e.g. protect clothing.

### Providing assistance

1. Where necessary adjust seating and table heights to comfortable levels and position pillows/cushions to provide appropriate support.
2. Position the chair close and obliquely to minimise twisting. It may be possible to sit at the corner of a table or opposite the person to help reduce twisting.
3. Establish a pace that gives the person time to chew and swallow and creates short rest pauses.
4. For lengthy periods of assistance arrange for colleagues to take over to prevent the build up of strain.
5. Use staff rotation and work scheduling to avoid concentration of activity.