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You have to open it to eat it: does food packaging used in hospitals impede intake in a well older population?

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Abstract

Abstract of a presentation at the ICCAS 2015 - The International Conference on Culinary Arts and Sciences: Opportunities and Challenges for Food and Eating in Society, Montclair State University, New Jersey, USA, 3-5 June.

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You have to open it to eat it: does food packaging used in hospitals impede intake in a well older population?

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Previous research has identified that hospital food and beverage packaging is a barrier to nutritional intake in the older hospitalised population. However there have been no specific studies to examine the relationship between packaging and actual intake by older people. Aim: The aim of this research was to determine whether the food and beverage packaging used in NSW public hospitals impedes intake among well older people in a simulated hospital setting Methods: A convenience sample of 64 well older people (greater than or equal to 65yrs) attended a simulated hospital ward at the University of Wollongong, NSW Australia. Nutritional status was assessed using the Mini Nutritional Assessment - Short Form (MNA-SF). Subjects were allocated to either a breakfast and snack meal or a lunch and snack meal and attended the University on two occasions, 1 week apart. Each subject experienced a 'sealed' and 'unsealed' packaging condition over the 2 research days. Intake was measured by weight and photography pre and post meal consumption. Results: Overall findings were not significant between intake and the 'sealed' versus 'unsealed conditions. However, the 7 subjects identified by the MNA-SF as 'at risk' of malnutrition, ate less of the high protein snack (cheese and biscuits) in the 'sealed' condition than in the 'unsealed' condition ($r=-.20$). Conclusion: This research has implications for the provision of packaged high protein snacks (cheese portions) for the older inpatient that is either at risk of malnutrition or is malnourished. Further research is indicated with older adults to determine the effect of packaging 'openability' on intake.