

# 5 Ways To Improve Patient Experience Through Catering



Hospitals that deliver ‘superior’ patient experience have 50% higher net margins than ones rated just ‘average’ according to a report by **Accenture\***. That’s quite an incentive to deliver great service, so how can it be achieved?

One aspect that is often overlooked is the catering side. Too often it is considered an obligation rather than an opportunity to improve Patient Experience, differentiate from other hospitals and give patients and guests a good reason to come back next time they need medical treatment. That’s not to mention the tremendous medical benefits that can be gained from providing the proper nutrition to patients.

In this guide, we highlight five areas which if applied correctly, can enhance Patient Experience, improve medical outcomes and make your hospital stand out.

## 1. Diet restrictions don’t have to mean boring food

Nutrition is key to positive outcomes during a hospital stay but a study by Becker’s Hospital Review shows that over half of patients don’t eat most of their meals during a hospital stay and that increases their risk of a negative outcome by nearly 6 times\*. For conditions from diabetes to cancer and beyond, the right nutrition at the right time can have a huge impact on the patient’s experience and outcome. All hospitals will cater for individual medical requirements but if you can cater to those specific needs whilst still offering variation, taste and presentation, then you will enhance the patient’s experience. By incorporating the latest food trends and tastes into hospital menus, everything stays fresh and interesting and up to date with the most recent thinking.

## 2. Make dining an experience that patients enjoy/remark upon

The reasons why people spend time in hospital are many and varied, but it's never because they want to be there. Being in hospital can be a stressful experience for patients and visitors alike, so if you can lighten that experience with an enjoyable dining experience then it will be appreciated and remembered. Getting good food makes people feel like they are being cared for and looked after which is after all, why your patients are there in the first place. That's why Sodexo ensure all staff that interact with visitors or patients go through a comprehensive training programme grounded in quality, safety & service. Ultimately, improving quality of life for patients, their visitors, our clients and our colleagues



## 3. Room Service

**Everyone likes the room service in a hotel so why not try to replicate that?**

Patients appreciate the flexibility of catering that fits in with their needs and time. They like the option to order from their room, from a pre-approved menu appropriate to their dietary requirements, that as well as being nutritionally right for their needs, is also appetising, varied and delivered to them on time and at the right temperature.

## 4. Contactless Dining

In an era of hyper-awareness of hygiene and a hesitance to be in busy environments with high levels of surface contact, patients, guests and hospital staff alike appreciate options to reduce the level of contact with other people when they are hungry.

Options for pre-ordering via a phone app, contactless payment and click-and-collect are readily adopted by staff and visitors because as well as being quick and convenient, they increase patient safety by reducing the risk of transmitting germs. They also free up time for patient care which, after all, is the reason everyone is there. These are all important ways you can add confidence to the dining experience while concerns are at the forefront of people's minds during the current pandemic. But even outside of Covid dominated times, there are real benefits to limiting contact in a hospital environment as a way to control the spread of germs.



## 5. Take steps to get feedback from patients and guests - and act upon that feedback!

Getting feedback from your patients and visitors is important for two main reasons. Firstly it can give you a first-hand account of where things are going well in terms of your catering and conversely, will highlight any areas of concern. This process can drive a programme of continuous improvement and an invaluable feedback loop if implemented correctly. Secondly, it's certainly true that people look at reviews online to inform their choices of healthcare so you want your hospital to feature highly and positively as much as possible.

In order to gather reviews, you are going to have to ask for it. Most people won't offer it automatically unless they have an outstanding experience one way or the other. To boost review numbers, consider sending a follow-up email a few days after a patient leaves to get their views or alternatively, offer a small incentive during their stay for all reviews submitted throughout their time in the hospital.

All research shows that well-fed and well-cared-for patients and visitors lead to better outcomes for patients, higher levels of customer satisfaction and ultimately, better outcomes for the hospital. With that in mind, we think that taking some of these strategies into consideration is well worth the effort.

- Accenture: U.S. Hospitals that Provide Superior Patient Experience Generate 50 Percent Higher Financial Performance than Average Providers (2016) - <https://newsroom.accenture.com/news/us-hospitals-that-provide-superior-patient-experience-generate-50-percent-higher-financial-performance-than-average-providers-accenture-finds.htm>
- Becker Hospital Review (2019) - <https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/quality/hospital-patients-have-high-risk-of-malnutrition-study-finds.html>