

# Mealtime interaction encourages hospitalized seniors to eat more

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Sharing a meal in good company can stimulate the appetite - particularly among hospitalized seniors - according to a new Université de Montréal study published in *The Gerontologist*.

"The more social interaction occurs at mealtimes in hospital geriatric re-adaptation units the better food intake will be," says Danielle St-Arnaud McKenzie.

A graduate of the Université de Montréal Department of Nutrition, St-Arnaud McKenzie conducted the study with Professor Marie-Jeanne Kergoat of the Faculty of Medicine, Professor Guylaine Ferland of the Department of Nutrition, as well as Laurette Dubé of McGill University.

Research has shown that a majority of patients suffer from nutritional deterioration during hospitalization. "Approximately 35 percent of elderly people suffer from malnutrition," says Marie-Jeanne Kergoat. "That's a scary estimate when we consider that nutrition tends to deteriorate during hospitalization."

St-Arnaud McKenzie observed some 30 patients during mealtimes at the re-adaptation unit of the Institut universitaire de gériatrie de Montréal (IUGM), which is affiliated to the Université de Montréal. Using an evaluation grid, she measured their verbal and non-verbal behaviors. By observing these patients at mealtimes she calculated the level of conviviality. She then measured food intake by looking at the quantity of food leftover after the meal.

Results were clear - there was a correlation between [food intake](#) and social interaction. What's more, patients ate more when social interactions were friendly and lively. The research team also found that nutritional deficiencies mostly occur when patients eat alone in their rooms.

As the population ages, the number of [seniors](#) will rise and researchers must find solutions to elderly

malnutrition. "By eating poorly, elderly [patients](#) risk developing other age-related health problems," says St-Arnaud McKenzie.

Source: University of Montreal ([news](#) : [web](#))

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