



Do You Have The Secret Weapon to Sell a Move-In On the Spot?

By Susan Saldibar

In case you haven't noticed, food is no longer a commodity in senior living. Food is serious business. It has to look good, taste good and be good for your residents. And, by "good" we are not just talking about being low in sodium, fat and sugar. Food now is expected to help ward off cognitive decline, keeping residents as mentally sharp as possible, for as long as possible.

Food can do more for senior living communities than we thought possible.

Here's a startling fact taken out of an informative presentation by [Gordon Food Service](#) (a Senior Housing Forum partner). It quotes research that states that eating at least 1-2 helpings per day of leafy dark green vegetables can make an individual the equivalent of 11 years younger in age than those who do not. Wow. It attributes this to the high amounts of lutein, folate, vitamin B, beta carotene, and polyphenols.

Face it. People are getting a lot smarter about food (including prospective residents).

I recently spoke with Dana Fillmore, RDN, and Healthcare Customer Marketing Manager for Gordon Food Service. Dana knows how powerful certain foods can be in helping slow cognitive decline. We talked about the MIND diet (Mediterranean Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay). You may be familiar with MIND, considered one of the most effective dietary programs to foster brain health and improve cognition.

Dana shared with me her growing list of evidence based brain-healthy foods. For the record, here's the latest: (You can get the full list [here](#))

- “Brain-healthy” foods groups: vegetables (especially leafy, green), nuts, berries, beans, whole grains, fish, poultry, olive oil and, yes, wine in moderation.
- Foods to avoid: red meat, butter, margarine, cheese, pastries and sweets, fried and “fast” food.

So, the challenge for today’s senior living community chefs is to create delicious menu items, using brain-healthy foods. And then, to be prepared to educate residents and their families about the value of those foods. “It’s important for food and nutrition-services teams to make the right food options available and help residents understand why certain choices may be beneficial,” says Dana.

When brain-healthy and palate-pleasing come together.

Dana also talked about the need for brain-healthy food to be prepared and presented in an appealing manner. It is no longer enough to use fresh, healthy ingredients. It needs to be served up in dishes that can be enjoyed by residents, staff and families alike. Thankfully, gone are the days of bland boiled chicken and “baby food” side dishes.

Dana showed me some of the menu items Gordon Food Service shares with senior living community chefs. And, yes, they look like something from your local bistro. Yet each one has an abundance of brain-healthy ingredients. Here are a few:

- **Farro and Asparagus Salad**
Brain foods: Farro, asparagus, onions, carrots, celery, baby field greens, almonds, olive oil
- **Roasted Vegetables on Quinoa**
Brain foods: Broccoli, cauliflower, yellow squash, carrots, celery, olive oil
- **Herbed Salmon**
Brain foods: Salmon, carrots, farro, fennel, spinach, crimini mushrooms

Who wouldn’t enjoy these?

But can a menu sell a move-in?

Finally, for those community operators out there who relegate healthy, delicious food to a check box on a list of amenities, I’ll share a true story (mine):

Years ago, a cousin of mine mentioned to me that she was looking at a few nursing homes for her mom. I didn’t think much about it until I ran into her again at a family function. I asked how it turned out. She told me she had narrowed down her list to a few places, but never got past the first one. Why? As she told it, the manager took her to visit their kitchen where the chef was preparing lunch (I’m pretty sure it was a vegetable lasagna). The chef proceeded to explain how important the ingredients were; how they were calibrated for heart and brain health. And, then, he let her taste test. She told me she was sold on the spot.

Does a senior living community have to be clean, well-managed to remain competitive? Yes. Does it need to provide high quality care and staff who are passionate about their work? Yes. But imagine if you could start your tour by way of your kitchen. How might that impact the rest of your tour? Could your community be the one chosen “on the spot”?

For more information on brain-healthy foods and preparation download Gordon Food Service’s Brain Foods: Smart Thinking for Healthcare [here](#).



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