

STRESS AWARENESS MONTH – CALMING DINING ENVIRONMENTS IN CARE

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Have you heard the saying *'You are what you eat'*?

I tend to lean more towards *'We are where we eat, how we eat, what we eat and how we digest, assimilate and eliminate'*!

Obtaining nutrition from food isn't only about the food we choose to eat. It can also be about the **environment** and **how stressed we are feeling**, which has a direct impact on how well we might **digest and absorb nutrients**.

There are two parts of our nervous system known as the **sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system**. Also more commonly known as *'fight or flight'* (the sympathetic) and the *'rest and digest'* (parasympathetic).

When we eat **surrounded by stressors** such as a busy loud environment, or with loud overwhelming music or the TV on, our fight or flight response is activated. This means that blood flow is directed away from the digestive tract in preparation to fight or run – making nutrients restricted and unable to pass into the blood stream for transportation to cells and organs.

When an environment is **calming and no stressors** are present, we are in a better position to receive food and digest properly. This gives more chance for the nutrients to be absorbed and go where they need to for use.

When looking at our dining environments across our **Nellsar Homes**, one of the key areas I look out for is how calming they are for residents.

I gauge how the environment **looks, feels, smells** and **sounds**, and work on ways we can make adjustments to better suit a calming space for people to eat in.

We have lots of residents living with **Dementia** residing in our **Nellsar Homes**. Cognitive impairments such as Dementia can heighten people's senses and make them more sensitive to the world around them. It is therefore important that we ensure our dining environments are as 'rest and digest' promoting as possible for our residents, so they can take time to enjoy their food in calm and pleasant surroundings which promote well-being and good digestion.