



# 7 Ways to Bring Your Dining Experience into the Future

These days, if you want a pizza, you can turn to one of several apps or websites to place your order without even uttering a word. You can also do the same for groceries, clothing, medication, and more. But, this isn't just a trend among people under 40—it's the way of life for many older adults as well.

Our older population seems to get younger and younger all the time. To keep up with them—and support their families—we need to offer amenities that help make everyone's life easier. One of the ways we can do this is by providing the human comforts they're used to, starting with their dining experience.

At Sodexo, our employees work hard to meet the needs of residents at our dining facilities, and we're always seeking new ways to improving the experience and evolve our ability to better meet the demands of the future.

**Here are 7 ways you can bring senior dining into the future:**

## **1. Rethink the salad bars and self-serve stations.**

Seniors are more conscious of how germs spread these days, so touching the same serving spoon as everyone else or selecting vegetables that someone else may have breathed on are experiences they'd prefer to avoid.

“I don't think self-service bars will ever reappear. Instead, we've expanded our menu and now offer more salad options and entrees.”

*Vernadine Jenkins, General Manager (New Jersey)*

## **2. Delivery is here to stay, so make it look (and taste) good.**

Seniors can order out, or they can order in. Because you're competing with local restaurants, play to your strengths. You're closest to their room, so there's no reason why your delivery shouldn't always be hot and plated nicely.

“We started delivering our meals differently during COVID-19. Now, we place fewer trays on our carts, even if it means more trips back and forth from our kitchen. That way, the resident’s meal is still hot when it reaches their door.”

*Kyle Williams, District Manager (California)*

### 3. Discard the plastic foam once and for all.

Many younger seniors are concerned about the planet their grandchildren will inherit. Investing in reusable to-go containers not only makes your food look nicer, but it’s also eco-friendly. Plus, it will save you money in the long run.

“We made the switch to reusable takeout containers because they provide a nicer presentation. It was a significant investment, but now we can just throw them in the dishwasher and use them over and over again.”

*Richard Beyerl, General Manager (California)*

### 4. Focus on healthy meals without sacrificing

**taste.** Many of today’s seniors care about their health. They go to the gym, lift weights, and walk with friends. They spent the past year learning the best ways to remain healthy during a global pandemic. For some of them, they’ve never felt better!

“Our residents have become more concerned with their health, which has opened up new doors for us. Over the past year, we’ve begun serving Impossible™ foods, which are meat-like products made from plants. Our residents were surprised that the food wasn’t meat and asked for more!”

*Jennifer Mondolino, General Manager (North Carolina)*

### 5. Bring the dining, and the cooking, outdoors.

Whether there’s a pandemic or any infectious disease affecting your regular operations, dining outside is less likely to spread germs. With a variety of outdoor cooking equipment available, as well as heat lamps and comfortable yet durable outdoor seating, there are plenty of reasons to expand your dining room.



“We were eager to reopen our dining rooms, but were concerned about health and safety during COVID-19. So, we created an entirely new dining experience outside, complete with outdoor grills, nice furniture, and a bar. Now, our residents love eating outdoors.”

*Brent Ridenour, District Manager (Virginia)*

**6. Get creative.** From the types of cuisine offered to plate presentation, residents are looking for food experiences that mimic the life they've had. Whether it's a pop-up food stand or celebrating food holidays, thinking outside of the box is a way to keep them interested and excited.

“We've been having more fun with food lately, including creating a daily snack cart that we roll through the residential area each day.”

*Nicole Heydorn, Area General Manager (Arizona)*

**7. Embrace technology, and then take it to the next level.** While some of your current residents may be hesitant to learn how to use a smartphone or tablet, the younger ones can no longer live their

lives without it. Instead of playing catch-up, look to what's coming next, and invest in technology with demonstrated ability to enhance the pain points or friction in the experience from the resident's viewpoint. For example, a partnership between Sodexo and Connected Living allows communities to integrate menu information directly into the system, replacing a manual feed and providing residents with easily accessible information.

Here's what is in application today and expected to increase in demand over time:

- Digital menus in restaurants
- Food delivery robots
- Online menus and ordering available prior to residents entering the dining room
- Self-pay kiosks for à la carte dining
- Smart home devices that can recite the daily menu and place a food order
- Real-time insights platforms like Experiencia, which identifies areas to optimize dining and staff activity while maximizing resident satisfaction.



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