Case Study 1 – Betty with loss of appetite

Problem
Betty is an 82-year-old lady who lives in a nursing home. She used to be a very good eater, but in recent months her appetite has decreased. Secondary to this, her weight has decreased 5kg in the past 2 months. There seems to be no medical reason for her loss of appetite; the doctor equates it to the ageing process and referred her to the dietitian.

Process
Betty, she seemed bright, aware and happy to talk about her food, the meals and her appetite. She gave a detailed account of what she used to eat and her likes and dislikes. Her intake of late has, however, been only very small amounts of odd meals, depending on whether she likes them. She reported to be put off by the large meals that the kitchen serves.

In making recommendations to Betty, she was encouraged to eat meals high in protein and high energy, in the distribution of small frequent meals. A list of foods that Betty likes and dislikes was noted. This was given to the kitchen so that they could provide alternatives to allow Betty to select an appealing and nourishing meal choice. The kitchen was also able to supply smaller and more frequent meals to her.

Betty was seen by the dietitian again after two weeks. She reported that she was eating a little more, as the meals were now more appealing to her. Her weight over this time had been stable, but it was still in the “underweight” category. Because of Betty’s weight still being low, Betty agreed to try and start drinking on Sustagen twice a day, at morning and afternoon tea. These drinks were kept to small volumes of 150ml but were made with full cream milk and the full dose of Sustagen to ensure Betty received the necessary nutrition and calories but that these extra drinks did not curb her appetite.

Results
Betty continued to be seen by the dietitian at monthly intervals and started to slowly regain some weight. Once she was back into the healthy weight range for her height, her Sustagen intake was reduced to one each day. Fortunately this was enough to keep her weight stable. Betty reports to continue to enjoy her food and is finding eating pleasurable again.

Further benefits for the facility- During the process of requesting various foods for Betty and setting up small frequent meals for her the kitchen staff took on a lot of informal education / information from the dietitian regarding the nutrition needs for the residents. The kitchen staff then took the initiative to start providing other residents with nourishing small frequent meals.