

Vegetarian guidance notes for hospital caterers



Vegetarians and vegans who are in hospital, either because they are sick or have just given birth, should be fed nutritious, well-balanced suitable meals that will aid a swift recovery.

Unfortunately, it seems many hospitals are not sufficiently informed about how to provide for veggies and vegans.

The definition of a vegetarian diet is one that contains no flesh, fish or fowl - in other words, nothing derived from an animal's dead body. A vegan diet excludes all egg and dairy products as well.

Animal Aid's survey of veggies and vegans who had been inpatients during the past two years (*Nil by Mouth* 2004) revealed that hospital provision varied widely across the country.

It is clearly the case that vegetarian and vegan patients should receive appropriate food throughout their stay in hospital – with at least one hot meal served daily. This must be a proper balanced meal and not just a plate of vegetables with the meat removed.



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We urge hospital caterers to adopt the following policies:

- Vegetarian and vegan patients should be given equal status to those who are meat-eating. They should never be made to feel awkward because of their dietary needs
- Provide at least one suitable hot meal everyday for veggie and vegan patients
- Meals should be varied and not predominantly cheese-based
- Ensure that, if requested, non-dairy alternatives to milk and marga can be provided for vegan patients
- Make sure that vegetarian foods are not contaminated by meat
- Fish dishes must never be labelled as vegetarian
- Dishes containing eggs or dairy products should not be marked as being suitable for vegans
- If a trolley system is in place in any particular hospital, sufficient veggie food should be prepared to ensure that it is still available for the patients who are served last.

Some examples of wholesome vegetarian food that is offered:

Veggie spaghetti bolognese, nutty crumble, pancake rolls, veggie bangers and mash, veg moussaka, lasagne, shepherd's pie, mushroom risotto

Alternatives to meat

The range of vegetarian convenience products is growing weekly, and many manufacturers can supply in bulk, either via wholesalers or directly to caterers.

There are now many types of frozen and refrigerated burgers, sausages, 'fishless fishcakes', 'veggie rashers', deli-style sandwich slices, 'nuggets', pies, soya mince and other products. These foods are very versatile and usually store well. Please see the end of this document for company details.

Why not switch to using meat-free gravy powder for making all your gravy? This will be much more convenient than having to make two kinds. Some of the most widely-used brands of gravy are totally vegetarian.

If you always buy egg-free sausages, burgers etc., you will be able to cater for vegetarians and vegans at the same time.

Alternatives to dairy products

Many people avoid consuming milk, cheese, butter, etc. for ethical reasons or due to allergies, and Jewish people usually avoid combining dairy foods with meat. There is also increasing evidence that the consumption of large amounts of dairy products can cause health problems such as acne, breathing difficulties and digestive upsets in children.

There are no nutrients in milk that cannot be obtained from other sources, and there is no evidence to suggest that adults and children who avoid dairy products are less healthy than other people.

Therefore, we feel that it is a mistake to assume that vegetarians need to eat a lot of dairy produce and to base all vegetarian options on cheese. Dairy alternatives are becoming widely available to caterers, and they tend to store well. Alternatively, cheese and milk can simply be left out of many dishes. Pizzas and pasta are just as palatable to children if served with tomato and herb based toppings, and baked potatoes can be served with vegetarian chilli, baked beans or coleslaw.

Most brands of vegetable margarine contain whey powder, and some still contain fish oil, but catering size tubs of dairy-free marg can be bought from wholesalers. You can also buy effective butter substitutes that remain soft when refrigerated and are therefore very convenient for use in frying. Vegetable ghee works very well for making curries.

Rather than having to keep two types of margarine and pastry in stock, why not simply switch over to using vegetarian, dairy-free brands for all your catering?

Suggestions for dairy-free desserts:

- Cornflake clusters coated in dairy-free dark chocolate
- Fruit salad with soya ice cream
- Apple strudel, treacle tart or summer fruit pudding (some frozen catering brands are dairy and egg free)
- Soya milk is perfect for making custard and rice puddings
- Why not experiment with egg and dairy free recipes for cakes and puddings?

The Better Hospital Food project

Four years ago the NHS launched an initiative to improve the quality and availability of food served in hospitals, and ensure that a variety of dietary needs, including vegetarian and vegan, are catered for fully. It was called the Better Hospital Food scheme (BHF)¹ and was part of a larger set of strategies (the NHS Plan).

One of the key BHF elements was that, for the first time, the NHS was to introduce a common standard of menu presentation and choice. This was supposed to ensure that patients knew what to expect when they went into hospital and would receive the same level of service no matter where they stayed.

A new NHS menu was designed by a group, led by Loyd Grossman, consisting of seven of Britain's leading chefs working alongside caterers, dieticians, nurses and patients.

More than 400 recipes were created and published in a new hospital recipe book, which included a CD-ROM demonstrating the layout of an ideal specimen menu.

1. See www.betterhospitalfood.com for more information

Alternatives to eggs

Vegans and some religious groups avoid eating eggs. Why not offer scrambled (mashed and lightly fried) tofu as an alternative to scrambled eggs?

Many doctors advise against feeding products containing raw eggs to children due to the risk of salmonella. Egg-free mayonnaise is therefore a very useful food item. It can be bought in bulk tubs from health food wholesalers, or can easily be made by mixing with a blender, 2 parts vegetable oil with 1 part vinegar and 1 part soya milk, plus a little salt and pepper. It will keep for at least a week.

Soya milk keeps for over a year unopened, and up to 5 days when opened. 'Soya dessert', (a custard alternative which comes in cartons), and soya cream also keep for a long time.

Soya cheese can be used to create some amazing vegan dishes, yet is rarely used in catering. It is easily available pre-packed at wholefood stores, or in bulk blocks from manufacturers and wholesalers. Redwood Foods make a very popular brand called 'Cheezley'.

Avoid glazing pastries with egg, and make sure that the pastry itself, as well as the contents, is egg and dairy free. Suitable types of frozen puff, filo and shortcrust pastry, such as the 'Jus Roll' brand, are widely available from wholesalers.



'Auxiliary staff did not understand what being veggie meant. I was offered fish repeatedly, shepherd's pie and even meat balls when I said I didn't eat meat...My partner had to bring me lots of food as I was breast-feeding my twins throughout my stay!'

Anna, who stayed in a hospital in Dudley, West Midlands.

Non-vegetarian ingredients to watch out for:

Gelatine is a binding agent made from animal bones. **Glycerin** can be either animal or plant derived. Many hard cheeses contain **rennet**, which is an extract of calves' stomachs.

Watch out for **lard**, which is often called 'animal fat', and beef dripping. The red colouring **cochineal** (E120) and the glazing agent **shellac** are both made from insects and are therefore avoided by most vegetarians.

If you are serving dairy-free options, check ingredients lists for butter, milk powder, lactose, whey and casein.

If offering egg-free options, watch out for 'albumen'. Some noodles contain dried egg.



Serving veggie food makes patients healthier

Following a well-balanced vegetarian diet is scientifically proven to be healthy. It reduces an individual's chances of suffering from a stroke, heart attack and several forms of cancer. Veggies are also less likely to become obese and their diet could increase their longevity.

Further Information

If you have any further questions about how you can adapt some of your recipes to make them meat, egg or dairy free, please contact our Vegetarian Campaigner, Ajaye Curry.

Tel. 01732 364 546

email: veggie@animalaid.co.uk

The following organisations produce free catering packs with sample bulk recipes:

The Vegetarian Society (UK): www.vegsoc.org
Parkdale, Dunham Rd, Altrincham, Cheshire,
WA14 4QG. Tel : 0161 925 2000,
email: info@vegsoc.org

The Vegan Society: www.vegansociety.com
Donald Watson House, 7 Battle Rd, St Leonards-
on-Sea, East Sussex, TN37 7AA.
Tel: 0845 458 8244.



Companies which supply vegetarian products in bulk to caterers and wholesalers

Redwood Foods Tel: 01536 400 557
Rashers, 'Cheatin' range of sandwich slices similar to ham, chicken etc., grated soya cheese

Plamil Foods Tel: 01303 850 588
Bulk tubs of egg-free mayonnaise, dairy-free chocolate drops

Wicken Fen Foods Tel: 01361 883 150
Sausages, nuggets

Realeat Tel: 01908 211311
Burgers, mince, fishless fishcakes, dried sausage and burger mixes

Ambrosian Foods (Midlands area only)
Tel: 01283 225 055 Burgers, sausages, dried mixes, 'porkless' pies.

Suma Foods Tel: 0845 458 2290
Large wholesaler of many vegetarian ambient and refrigerated brands.

These are just a few examples. Other good brands are widely available.

Animal Aid, The Old Chapel, Bradford Street, Tonbridge, Kent, TN9 1AW

Tel: 01723 364 546 • www.animalaid.org.uk • email: veggie@animalaid.co.uk

Animal Aid campaigns peacefully against cruelty to animals, and promotes vegetarian living. We produce a range of posters and booklets and work closely with schools and health centres.

Please contact us for further information about our work.

