

# OLDER VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

This guide provides information and advice for those providing meals for older people who are vegetarians and vegans.

## It is particularly aimed at:

- Care homes
- Retirement villages and similar schemes with on-site catering
- Supported accommodation, such as very sheltered housing for frail older people
- Older vegetarians and their relatives and friends

## But it may also be useful for:

- Day support and lunch clubs
- Home support – such as domiciliary care and meals on wheels
- The Commission for Social Care Inspection
- Councils who commission social care services for older people
- Hospitals and hospices (although VFL plans to publish a guide for hospitals in the future)

A survey in 2007 by the Food Standards Agency showed that people who are completely vegetarian make up around 2% of the population – which is about 1.5 million – and a further 7% are 'partly vegetarian', making around 5.5 million in total.

Furthermore, Food Industry research shows that 45% of the population can be classified as 'meat-reducers'. So, providers of support to older people will definitely encounter service users who are interested in the vegetarian option.

Those catering for older people will be familiar with trying to serve meals reflecting preferences, choice, and individual needs. The Commission for Social Care Inspection's 2006 Bulletin *Highlight of the Day?* was very useful in highlighting the general issues. But it only touched tangentially on vegetarianism. This guide aims to give care homes and others catering for older people useful guidance to help them respond to the specific needs of vegetarians and vegans.

There is a growing recognition of the importance of nutrition in care settings. In November 2006 the Government launched its *Dignity in Care* campaign and this states:

**“High quality health and social care services should be delivered in a person-centered way that respects the dignity of the individual receiving them. Unfortunately, older people are not always treated with the respect they deserve.”**

**'Oh, by the way, the new arrival's a vegetarian.'**

If you're in charge of catering, and despite your best intentions, these words are likely to cause an immediate response: one that is quite possibly negative!

But, don't despair. With a little thought and planning, vegetarians and vegans need not create a lot of extra work. This guide makes it easier to make meals an enjoyable experience for your vegetarian or vegan diners. Perhaps you'll get a few tips to help in catering for your non-vegetarians too?

Being vegetarian can mean receiving a monotonous and unbalanced diet of omelettes and macaroni cheese. Use of this guide should prevent that happening. Vegetarian for Life is committed to ensuring that older vegetarians and vegans receive a nutritionally balanced and enjoyable diet of their choice.

This publication is aimed primarily at residential settings, but most of the guidance is transferable to settings where older people receive just one meal a day, such as lunch clubs.

**■ Why does anyone become vegetarian or vegan?**

The main reasons why someone chooses to be vegetarian or vegan are:

- Animal welfare
- The environment
- Health
- Religious, spiritual and moral beliefs

Intensive farming methods can be very cruel; there is no doubt that a vegetarian diet is kinder to the environment; and there's mounting evidence that vegetarians are

healthier than meat-eaters, therefore making less call on the health service. Any principle that is central to a person's belief-system should be respected. Vegetarianism is particularly important in the Hindu, Buddhist, Rastafarian and Jain faiths. Also, considerable numbers of Quakers are vegetarian.

Older vegetarians and vegans have chosen their lifestyle for good reasons. They decided to live a life that is kinder: kinder to animals, kinder to the planet and kinder to themselves.

If you are interested in finding out more, including the research background supporting the vegetarian choice, please contact either The Vegetarian Society or The Vegan Society, who will be very pleased to help you. Contact information is given at the end of the guide.