

BEING VEGETARIAN IN RESIDENTIAL CARE - CELEBRATING NATIONAL VEGETARIAN WEEK

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This week is National Vegetarian Week (13-19 May). Organised by the Vegetarian Society, and supported by celebrities such as Stephen Fry and Joanna Lumley, it is an opportunity to spend a week celebrating the diversity and flavour that a vegetarian diet can offer.

Vegetarians and vegans in residential care

The Vegetarian Society recently surveyed 1,000 care homes to find out how many residents are vegan or vegetarian. Since the survey was last commissioned in 2014, the number of vegans in residential care has increased by a whopping 167%!

They go on to explain in this month's Veg Society Newsletter that many vegetarians and vegans genuinely fear being fed meat should they lose capacity. Being vegan or vegetarian is often central to a person's identity and may be the strongest belief that they hold. It might be something that someone has committed to for many years – even decades. It is our responsibility as a Care

Provider to ensure that the people we are catering for receive the variety and choice they deserve.

Protein and plants

We all know that protein is an important part of a balanced diet. It is even more important when people are recovering from an illness or operation. What is less commonly known is that protein doesn't have to come from meat, and can be found in an abundance of plant foods. Nuts and nut butters, tofu/tempeh, leafy greens (spinach, kale, broccoli, beans), black beans, pinto, adzuki, mung beans, turtle beans and green peas are all full of protein.

A protein is a large molecule which is made up from amino acids. Meat (including fish) and eggs often have the complete set of amino acids we require. Vegetables and other plant proteins do not contain a full set when eaten in isolation or even when sticking to the same one or two choices. The trick is to ensure you are eating a full spectrum of plant protein foods every day, that way all the amino acids required will be balanced and available in the diet.

Commitment to vegetarianism

Many of the menus throughout our Nellsar Homes offer a vegetarian choice as a standard second option. This means we are providing for vegetarian diets, or people who simply fancy a meat-free day, and ensures we are already prepared for our prospective vegetarian residents who are yet to join us.

Nellsar is also a member of [Vegetarian for Life](#) who are a charity dedicated to supporting vegetarians in later life.

One of my favourite vegetarian meals is Aubergine Parmigiana. It is on the menu at one of our Homes and the residents love it! I can't wait to go and try it! Here is a recipe taken from BBC Good Food:

Aubergine parmigiana

Ingredients

For the aubergine:

- 2 large aubergines, sliced into thin slices about a 5mm/¼in thick
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 100g/3½oz ricotta
- 100g/3½oz Parmesan, grated (or alternative vegetarian hard cheese)
- 100g/3½oz mozzarella, sliced
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the tomato sauce:

- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 red onion, finely chopped
- a good splash olive oil

- 2 x 400g tins chopped tomatoes
- 2 tsp dried oregano
- 125ml/4fl oz red wine

Method

- Brush the aubergine slices with olive oil on both sides to coat. Heat a griddle pan and cook the aubergines for a couple of minutes on both sides until lightly browned. Set aside while you get on with the tomato sauce.
- Heat a large frying pan. Fry the garlic and onion with a little oil until soft. Add the chopped tomatoes, oregano and wine. Simmer for about 15 minutes, or until the sauce thickens.
- Preheat the oven to 220C/200C Fan/Gas 7.
- In a medium-sized roasting tin, spread a little tomato sauce over the bottom of the tin. Add a layer of aubergine slices and spread another layer of tomato sauce on top.
- Spread half the ricotta on the top and sprinkle with Parmesan, salt and pepper. Continue to repeat the layers until all the aubergine is used. Finish with a layer of mozzarella slices topped with a final sprinkle of Parmesan. Bake for 25 minutes.
- Serve the parmigiana hot with a salad alongside.