

# More vegetarian options reduce meat consumption among hospital patients

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Food in hospitals often does not enjoy a good reputation. The proportion of meat on the plate in particular is too high and often does not meet the recommendations of the German Nutrition Society (DGE), which

advocates a more plant-based diet in hospitals. Clinics can do a lot to motivate patients to choose a healthier menu, as two new studies by Bonn University Hospital (UKB) and the University of Bonn show.

The results can serve as a basis for [decision-makers](#) in hospitals to make culinary changes. An article describing the results of the studies is [published](#) in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*.

The research team led by Prof. Simone Dohle, Head of the Health and Risk Communication Lab at the Institute of Family Medicine at the UKB, conducted two online studies that are representative of the German adult population that consumes meat at least once a week. Both studies were based on a [menu](#) from a German university [hospital](#).

The studies involved a hypothetical scenario: divided into two groups, the study participants were asked to imagine they were in hospital. Every day for two weeks, they had to indicate which of the three available dishes they would choose if they were in hospital. One group was given a menu with two meat-based dishes per day, the other a menu with one meat-based dish per day. This resulted in the study participants from the second group eating more plant-based meals.

The Bonn researchers went further in their experiment and marked the meals with certain labels such as "colorful and healthy." Combined with a high availability of vegetarian dishes, however, this reduced satisfaction with the menu. Renaming the meals from "wholefood, light food and vegetarian food" to "Menu 1, Menu 2 and Menu 3" had no effect on the preferences and satisfaction of the study participants.

The results suggest that menu design elements can influence the [food choices](#) and satisfaction of meat eaters in health care settings, but this should be investigated in further studies in clinics.

Prof. Dohle, who is a member of the Transdisciplinary Research Area (TRA) Sustainable Futures at the University of Bonn, states, "Food choice architecture can help to move people towards healthier and more sustainable dietary options. For patients who receive standard hospital meals and have not been prescribed a specific diet, more vegetarian options in the menu could encourage healthier menu choices.

"Further elaboration of the menu description, on the other hand, is not necessary and could even reduce satisfaction. We hope that our study results will now provide a scientific basis for sustainable changes to hospital menus that would contribute to a healthier diet in general."

**More information:** Julia Meis-Harris et al, Food for future: The impact of menu design on vegetarian food choice and menu satisfaction in a hypothetical hospital setting, *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jenvp.2024.102348](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2024.102348)

Provided by University Hospital of Bonn (UKB)

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