

Good Practice Guidelines Food and Diet

- A vegetarian option is the least that ought to be offered to patients and staff from ethnic groups if a specific meal is not available for them.
- Vegetarian in this context means not only no meat but also no animal products such as butter, cheese and eggs. Many groups will also not eat fish.
- Some people may find hospital food bland compared with their usual diet. Keep an eye on patients to make sure that they are eating enough.
- Do not simply remove the offending items of food from a plate and then hand it back to someone. If they do not want a particular item, put the plate to one side and start again.
- Do not transfer serving utensils from one bowl or dish to another. Those used for serving 'forbidden' food must not be used to dish out other foods, otherwise 'cultural cross-contamination' will occur.
- Fruit is always an acceptable option.
- Consider allowing a patient's family, friends or community to bring in food for them as this is often more acceptable, but before doing so check hospital policy on this issue and that the patient is not on a medically restricted diet.
- Remember that tea and coffee are stimulants and so may not be acceptable to some patients or staff members. Do not put milk into drinks automatically; for example, Jews will not accept milk mixed with other liquids. Always offer an alternative such as fruit juice or bottled water.
- Try to keep the names of individual dishes simple and descriptive. For example, people may not know what is in 'Irish stew'.