

## PRESS RELEASE

### Healthier nutrition in hospital possible thanks to modified menus

Bonn studies show: More vegetarian options reduce meat consumption

**Bonn, August 01, 2024 - 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 (<https://www.station-ernaehrung.de/dge-qualitaetsstandard/gestaltung-der-verpflegung>). 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. Around 2,000 people took part. The results can now serve as a basis for decision-makers in hospitals to make culinary changes. The results of the study will be published in the current August issue of 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 healthcare 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, comments on the results: "Food choice architecture can help to move people towards healthier and more sustainable dietary options. For patients

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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."

**Publication:** Julia Meis-Harris, Qëndresa Rramani-Dervishi, Alice E. Seffen, Simone Dohle: Food for future: The impact of menu design on vegetarian food choice and menu satisfaction in a hypothetical hospital setting; Journal of Environmental Psychology; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2024.102348>

**Image material:**



**Caption:** The research team led by Prof. Simone Dohle hopes that the study results will provide a scientific basis for sustainable changes to hospital menus, which would contribute to a healthier diet in general.

**Picture credits:** University Hospital Bonn / A. Winkler

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**About Bonn University Hospital:** The UKB treats around 500,000 patients per year, employs around 9,500 staff and has total assets of 1.8 billion euros. In addition to the 3,500 medical and dental students, 550 people are trained in numerous healthcare professions each year. The UKB is ranked first among university hospitals in NRW in the Focus Clinic List and has the second-highest case mix index (case severity) in Germany. The F.A.Z. Institute has awarded the UKB first place among university hospitals in the category "Germany's Training Champions 2024".