

Nurses advocacy for plant-based diet in hospitals. Connecting Sustainability, Ethics and Evidence- Based Practice







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October 2025

About me

- Nurse +15 years
- Plant based Health Professional Nurse Lead
- PB Nutrition certification, University of Winchester
- Lifestyle Medicine Professional
- FNF - Green Leadership Programme 2023/24
- RNRM National Sustainability Network NHSE
- Vegan lifestyle since 2020



Agenda

-  **Veganism Vs plant-based diet**
-  **Sustainability**
-  **Health benefits of PB diet**
-  **Ethical aspects**
-  **Nurses in action**
-  **Practical tips**

What is Veganism?

- “Veganism is a **philosophy and way of living** which seeks to exclude - as far as is possible and practicable - all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose.” – *The Vegan Society*
- **Extends beyond diet** - an ethical and environmental stance.
- Rooted in compassion, justice, and non-harm.



<https://www.vegansociety.com/about-us/further-information/key-facts>

Veganism as a Protected Philosophical Belief

- Veganism comes within the scope of international human rights provisions and **vegans in the UK are protected under human rights and equality law.**



<https://plantbasedhealthprofessionals.com/wp-content/uploads/Hospital-Vegan-Food-221120.pdf>

What is a Plant-based diet?



What is a Plant-Based Diet?

- A whole food plant-based diet (WFPBD) is one consisting of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, with few or no animal products and ultra-processed foods.



- “Well-planned plant-based diets can support **healthy living at every age and life stage**. Include a wide variety of healthy whole foods to ensure your diet is balanced and sustainable”. *The British Dietetic Association (BDA)*

<https://plantbasedhealthprofessionals.com/wp-content/uploads/Plant-Basted-Eatwell-Guide-A4.pdf>

Inclusive for All

- Plant-based meals cater for **all religions and cultures**.
- Compatible with Halal, Kosher, Hindu, and Buddhist dietary principles.
- Promotes inclusivity and unity in healthcare environments.
- Every hospital should also have an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy available on the public website outlining its commitment to the Equality Act 2010.

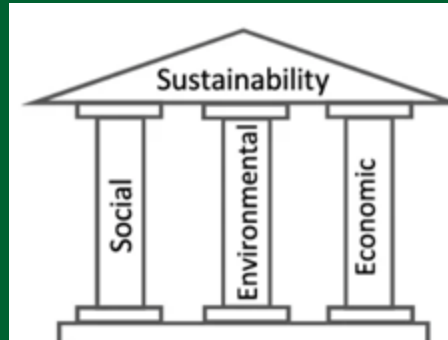


<https://static.vecteezy.com/system/resources/previews/016/615/737/original/dei-for-diversity-equity-and-inclusivity-vector.jpg>



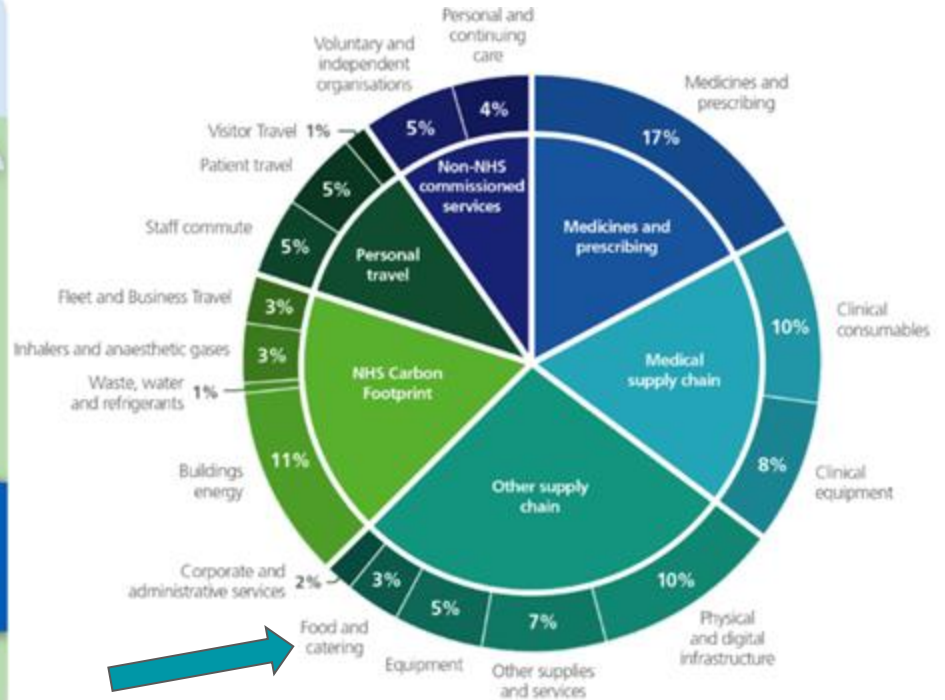
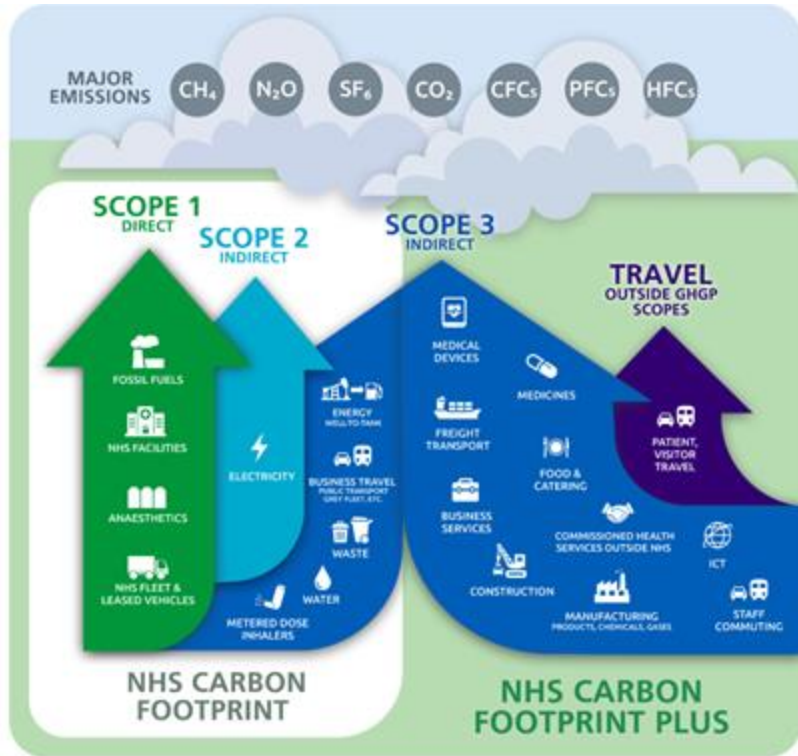
Sustainability

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”



World Commission on Environment and Development (UN - Brundtland Report, 1987)

Delivering a 'Net Zero' National Health Service



<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/five-years-greener-nhs-progress-forward-look/>

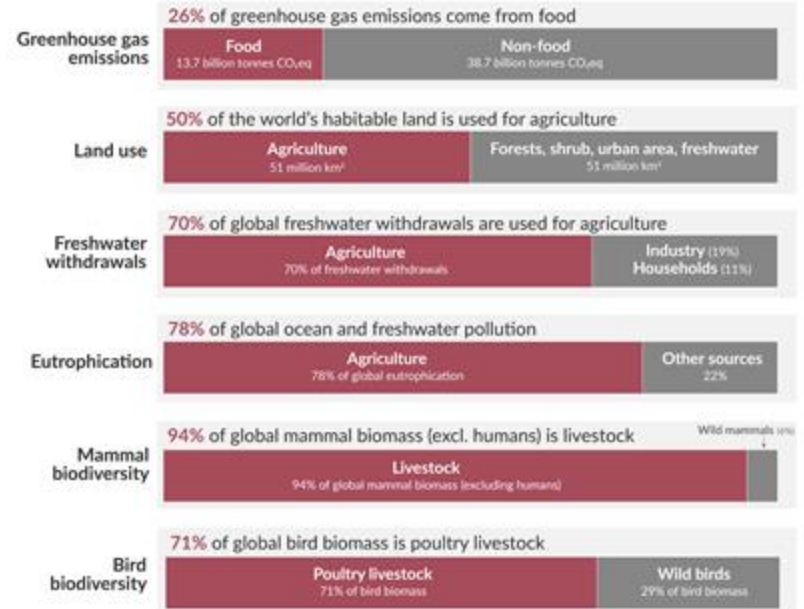
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/greenernhs/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2022/07/B1728-delivering-a-net-zero-nhs-july-2022.pdf>

Impact of our food system on planetary health

- >30% of all GHG emissions
- Animal agriculture >50% of these emissions
- Animal ag is the leading cause of biodiversity loss
- In the UK, the food system accounts for a 1/5 of GHG emissions – but that rises to around 30% if we factor in emissions from all the food we import
- Red meat and dairy production >70% of farming emissions

The environmental impacts of food and agriculture

Our World in Data



Data sources: Poore & Nemecek (2018); UN FAO; LPI AQUASTAT; Bai-Ou et al. (2018).
OurWorldinData.org – Research and data to make progress against the world's largest problems.

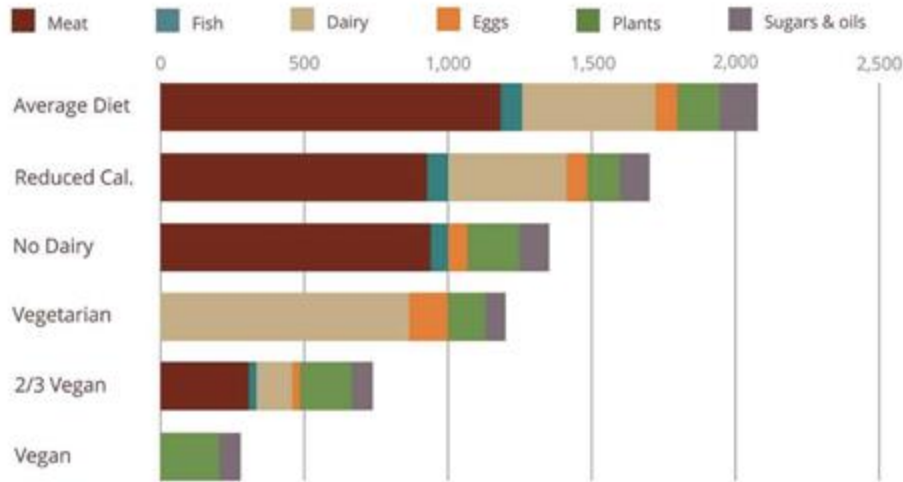
licensed under CC-BY by the author Hannan Richter.
Data published: November 2022.

<https://ukhealthalliance.org/news-item/lancet-countdown-on-health-and-climate-change-2024-uk-policy-brief-identifies-key-health-priorities-for-cop29/>
<https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org>

What we eat really matters

GHG emissions of various diets

kg of CO2 equivalents per year



Kim et al (2019) Country-specific dietary shifts to mitigate climate and water crises, *Global Environmental Change*

Which milk is best for the planet?



Poore & Nemecek (2018) Reducing Food's Environmental Impacts Through Producers and Consumers, *Science*

<https://awellfedworld.org/wp-content/uploads/Climate-Food-Guide-2024-single-pages.pdf>



Climate change - the biggest health threat facing humanity

- The World Health Organisation



Global food system emissions could preclude achieving the 1.5° and 2°C climate change targets

‘Even if fossil fuel emissions were eliminated immediately, **emissions from the global food system alone would make it impossible to limit warming to 1.5°C and difficult even to realise the 2°C target**’.



Global food system emissions could preclude achieving the 1.5° and 2°C climate change targets.
Science. 2020 Nov 6;370(6517):705-708. doi: 10.1126/science.aba7357.

The health crisis

- Unhealthy diets are the leading cause of chronic ill health
- Diets are too high in ultra-processed foods and lacking in fibre-rich plant-based food
- This is now costing £268 billion pounds in direct and indirect healthcare costs

UK's unhealthy food habits cost £268bn a year, report finds

Exclusive: Food, Farming and Countryside Commission added up cost to NHS and economy of diet-linked disease



<https://ffcc.co.uk/publications/the-false-economy-of-big-food>

Why are we talking about food?



HEALTH CRISIS



CLIMATE BREAKDOWN



BIODIVERSITY LOSS



ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE



PANDEMIC RISK



AIR POLLUTION



SOCIAL JUSTICE

Benefits of a plant-based diet

- Low in energy yet high in nutrients
 - Supports a healthy body weight
- Low in saturated fat
 - improves blood lipids
- High in fibre
 - Helps satiety
 - improves gut health
 - improves insulin sensitivity
- High in phytonutrients
 - Lowers inflammation
- Low in sugar
- Can support health across all ages and stages of life



Benefits of a plant-based diet

Disease	Risk reduction
Coronary heart disease ¹	25%↓
Type 2 diabetes ²	34%↓
Cancer risk ³	15%↓
Stroke ⁴	10%↓
Renal failure ⁵	14%↓
Fatty liver ⁶	24%↓
Parkinson's disease ⁷	22%↓
Sleep apnoea ⁸	17%↓
Venous thromboembolism ⁹	14%↓
COVID-19 incidence/severity ¹⁰	10%↓/40%↓
All-cause mortality ^{11,12}	10-16%↓

¹JACC 2017 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jacc.2017.05.047>

²PLOS Medicine 2016 <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002039>

³International Journal of Cancer 2018 <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijc.31593>

⁴Neurology 2021 DOI: 10.1212/WNL.00000000000011713

⁵Clinical Journal of the American Society of Nephrology 2019

<https://doi.org/10.2215/CJN.12391018>

⁶Clinical nutrition 2019 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clnu.2018.08.010>

⁷Mov Disord. 2023 <https://doi.org/10.1002/mds.29580>

⁸ERJ Open Res 2023 <https://doi.org/10.1183/23120541.00739-2023>

⁹JACC 2024 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jacadv.2024.101318>

¹⁰Gut. 2021 Nov;70(11):2096-2104. doi: 10.1136/gutjnl-2021-325353

¹¹Circulation 2019 <https://doi.org/10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.119.041014>

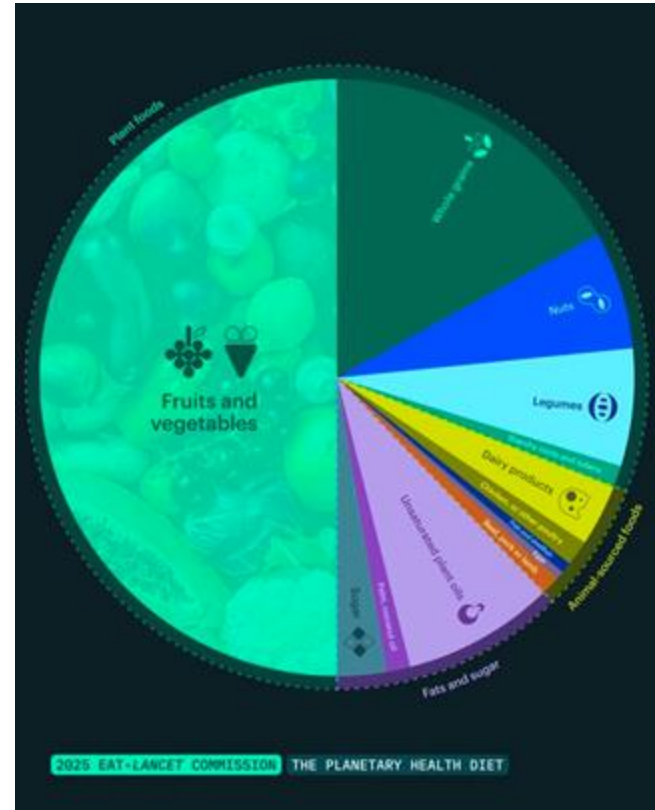
¹²JAMA Netw Open.2023; doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.4714

What is a healthy and sustainable diet?

87.7% plant-based

Per week

- 1 portion of red meat (105g)
- 2 portions poultry (210 grams)
- 2 eggs
- 2 portions of fish (210g)
- 250g/day dairy
- Estimated to save 15 million (27%) premature deaths per year
- 42% reduction in antibiotic use



The EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy, sustainable, and just food systems Rockström, Johan et al. The Lancet, Volume 406, Issue 10512, 1625 - 1700



Ethical aspects



How many animals get slaughtered for meat every day?

Our World in Data



900,000 cows



1.4 million goats



1.7 million sheep



3.8 million pigs



12 million ducks



202 million chickens
This means that every average minute
140,000 chicken get slaughtered



Hundreds of millions of fish*

Data: Food and Agriculture Organization. The icons are from the Houn Project. The numbers are based on the global totals for 2021. To express them for the average day the totals were divided by 365.

*Estimates of the number of fish killed are, unfortunately, very uncertain. But while the uncertainty is high, it is clear that the number of fish killed is extremely large. Hundreds of millions of fish are certainly killed every day. This is discussed in the accompanying article: ourworldindata.org/how-many-animals-get-slaughtered-every-day. Research is needed to close the existing gaps in our statistical understanding of how many animals are killed by humans.

OurWorldInData.org - Research and data to make progress against the world's largest problems. Licensed under CC BY by Max Roser

The 6Cs* of Nursing (and Veganism)

♥ **Care** – for patients

♥ **Care** – for all sentient beings

🧡 **Compassion** – empathy and kindness

🐾 **Compassion** – no unnecessary harm

🎓 **Competence** – apply knowledge for good

📖 **Competence** – evidence-based nutrition

Speaking up for human, animal, and planetary health = holistic care.

|
🦋 **Courage** – to do what's right

Awareness

🌍 **Commitment** – to patients and society

🔥 **Courage** – to challenge norms

🌍 **Commitment** – to planetary and public health.

*<https://www.rcn.org.uk/About-us/Equity-diversity-and-inclusion/Taking-time-to-talk-leaders/Patient-case-for-going-further/Values-and-standards>

Why nurses?

New 7Ps for nursing unveiled as part of CNO strategy

16 NOVEMBER, 2023 | BY ELLA DEVEREUX

The chief nursing officer (CNO) for England has unveiled a brand new vision for nurses, midwives and nursing associates in England.



1. **Protecting our Planet**
Emphasising sustainability, lower-carbon care and advocacy for those most affected by climate change.
1. **Prevention, Protection, Promotion**
2. **Person-centred Practice**
3. **Public and Patient Safety**
4. **Professional Leadership and Integration**
5. **People and Workforce Development**
6. **Professional Culture**

<https://www.nursingtimes.net/leadership/new-7ps-for-nursing-unveiled-as-part-of-cno-strategy-16-11-2023/>

Past and present

1859: All roads lead to Florence

Nursing's leadership originated with Florence Nightingale's 1859 treatise on ventilation and light. Her progressive and subversive work made it clear that **all health is environmental health**; all life depends on the earth's primal assets.

2014–present: At the table

Nurses collaborated with other health professionals to create national and international policy. Early successes in this area included substantive recommendations from the White House (2016). Nursing leadership has been instrumental in advancing the work of the Global Consortium on Climate and Health Education and the Climate and Health Alliance. Both the International Council of Nurses and the American Academy of Nursing have led throughout the years.

<https://www.bmj.com/content/373/bmj.n1049>

Analysis » The Future of Nursing

Nursing's pivotal role in global climate action

BMJ 2021 ; 373 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n1049> (Published 14 June 2021)

Cite this as: BMJ 2021;373:n1049

Read our collection on the Future of Nursing

Article

Related content

Metrics

Responses

Peer review

Patricia Butterfield, professor emeritus¹, Jeanne Leffers, professor emeritus², Maribel Díaz Vázquez, professor³

Author affiliations ▼

Correspondence to: P Butterfield pbutter@wsu.edu

Nurses moved early and eagerly to advocate action to resist climate change and are well positioned to achieve much more. **Patricia Butterfield, Jeanne Leffers, and Maribel Díaz Vázquez** urge nurses to act boldly within and across professional boundaries

Veracity Index 2024

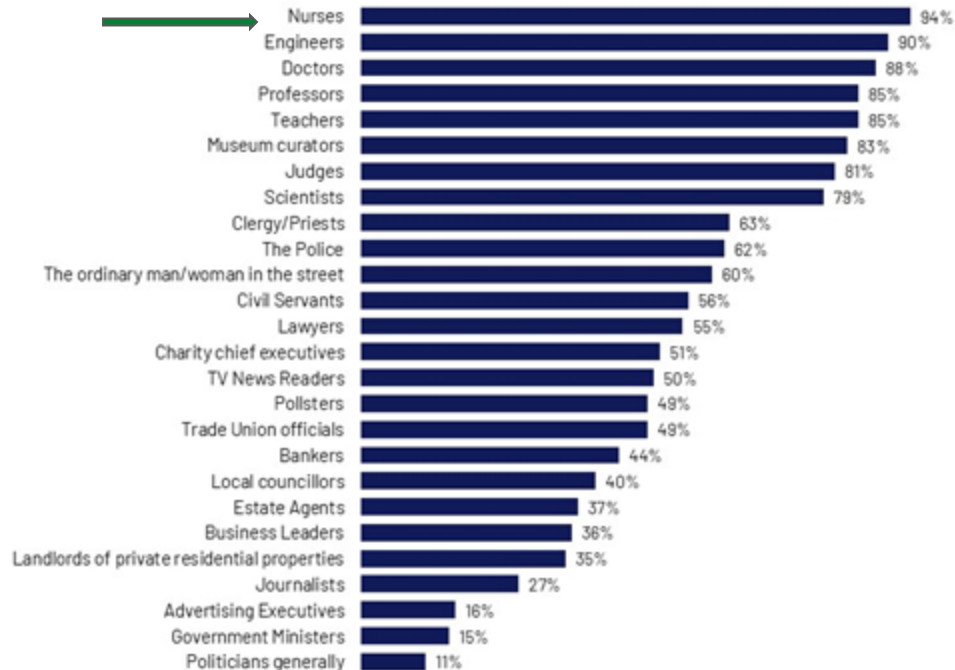
All professions

"Now I will read you a list of different types of people. For each would you tell me if you generally trust them to tell the truth, or not?"

% trust to tell the truth

Base: 1,015 British adults aged 16+, interviewed by telephone 9 – 15 October 2024

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Hospitals can lead by example

- >50% of eligible patients stick with the plant-based meal
- >90% satisfaction rates
- Emissions from food have fallen by 36%
- New York is expanding plant-based meals across public sectors

Health

New York City Hospitals Make Plant-Based Meals the Default Option

September 29, 2022



Image: @defaultveg on Instagram

<https://dnyuz.com/2023/08/31/how-new-yorks-public-hospitals-cut-carbon-emissions-more-vegetables/>

From Theory to Practice

FLORENCE
NIGHTINGALE
FOUNDATION
ACADEMY

FNF
FOUNDED & INSPIRED BY A FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

NHS

Transition to plant-based food in healthcare

Giovanna Dicandia
Heart Failure Nurse



March 2024

Introduction

Unhealthy diets are responsible for 25% of deaths globally more than tobacco, for 31% of premature deaths in Europe, creating 35% of all greenhouse gas emissions.
A whole food plant-based diet consists of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, with no or few animal products.
Plant-based diet massively cuts environmental and health damage reducing greenhouse gases emissions, land and water use, pollution, biodiversity loss, antimicrobial resistance and pandemic risk.

Improvement methodology



The approach

What we were trying to accomplish

Promote public and planetary health by encouraging healthier and sustainable food choices in hospitals and engaging stakeholders for a positive transition.

What we measured to understand if our change was an improvement

A recent study found that, compared to an animal-based diet, a plant-based diet resulted in 75% less GHG, 75% less land use and 54% less water use. Plant-based diets reduce the incidence of cardiovascular disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes. Sustainable plant-based meals consistently come in at a much lower price than recipes with animal products.

What changes we made / are making

Continue to raise awareness and promote education on the evidence-based health and environmental impact of food choices.
120 questionnaires distributed to patients and staff; 65% would be in favour of the transition.
Continue to collect data and evaluate results to achieve better practices and outcomes.

The impact and next step

Local Audit Carbon Footprint (equivalent food catering)			
	Meals (1000)	Meals (1000)	Meals (1000)
	kg CO2e/meal	kg CO2e/meal	kg CO2e/meal
2 Meat with Fish, Dairy and Eggs	4.03.20	154.140.00	
2 Plant-Based Meals	10.20	1.000.40	

- Plant-based food reduce CO₂ emissions up to 100 times compared to animal based food.
- There are 1148 healthcare facilities in the UK, with potential total saving of 1.8M CO₂/year, with potential total saving of 1.8M CO₂/year.
- "A 100% switch to plant-based diet in England could save the NHS £6.7 billion/year" (Office of Health Economics Study, 2023)
- Public health strategies should facilitate the transition to a balanced, nutrient dense and sustainable plant based food.

Leadership learning

The FNF Green healthcare Leadership Programme has taught me the importance of presence and impact as a leader. I've been inspired by like-minded leaders who, driven by a sense of purpose and values, champion sustainability. Together, we strive to deliver evidence-based lower carbon care, emphasising that positive and sustainable changes are not only necessary but also achievable.



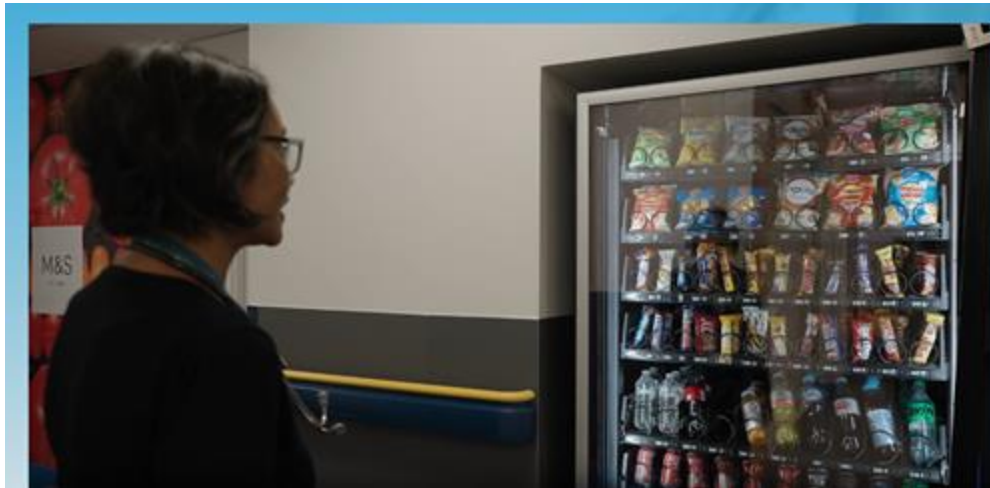
"The very first requirement in a hospital is that it should do the sick no harm." Florence Nightingale

GBD
GREENER BY DEFAULT

Pilot Agreement 2025



National initiative – Plants First Healthcare



<https://plantsfirsthealthcare.com>



Binning the beige buffet

By Ben Ireland

Health & Society

31.07.25

Health service catering has tended to offer little in the way of either 'health' or 'service', but it's not all pie, chips and pop, as **Ben Ireland** discovered at a hospital determined to do better

<https://thedoctor.bma.org.uk/articles/health-society/binning-the-beige-buffet/>

Food in Healthcare report 2025

- Include plant-based options as default.
- Reduce meat and dairy purchasing.
- Train catering staff in plant-based cooking.
- Adopt sustainable procurement models.
- Use behavioural science strategies (e.g., default options) to shift uptake without removing choice.
- Educate staff and patients, share recipes and success stories.



FOOD IN HEALTHCARE REPORT Making Plant-Based Meals the Default: For A Healthier, More Sustainable NHS

Isabelle Sadler and Dr Shireen Kassam



<https://plantbasedhealthprofessionals.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/PLANTS-FIRST-HEALTHCARE-REPORT-1-1.pdf>

Barriers

- Limited training/expertise in plant-based nutrition
- Cultural and practical challenges
- Time constraints
- Other NHS priorities
- Lobbying and influence
- Sustainable food is not part of NHS 10 year plan (published in 2019 and updated 2025)



Opportunities

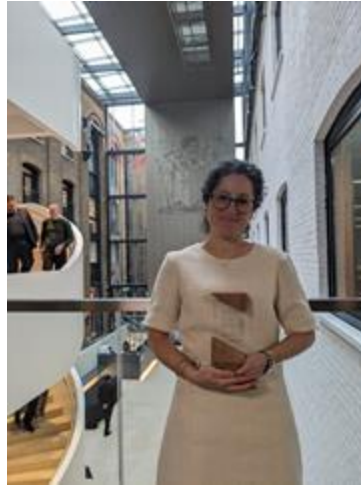
- **Education** in plant-based nutrition
- Be a **role model**
- **Start conversations** around plant-based diets
- Normalise plant-based meals
- Organise talks at your workplace
- Look for support and allies
- Engage with catering teams
- Influence nutrition & hydration policy
- Approach exec team at the hospital
- Bring PB food into discussion around sustainability
- Seeking support from NHS England
- Consider contacting Greener By Default

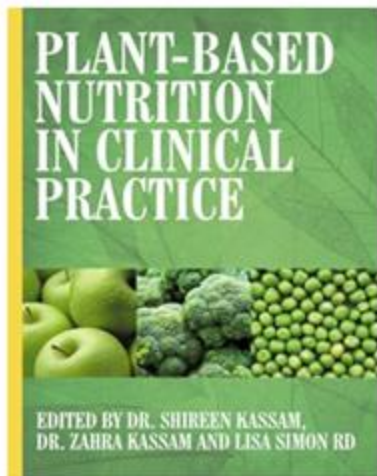


It can be done!

1. **Move your money** — to a bank that doesn't invest in fossil fuels.
2. **Move your energy** — to a 100% renewable source.
3. **More plant-based food** — seasonal and local where possible.
4. **More green travel** — walking and cycling, more trains, fewer planes.
5. **More pre-loved** — local and low-carbon brands.
6. **Measure your CO₂ footprint** — and cut where you can.
7. **Motivate your loved ones** — to perform their 7 acts to save the world.

<https://www.realzero.earth/7-acts-1>





30 CPD Hours

PLANT BASED NUTRITION

Via online store

A global shift to a predominantly plant-based diet is deemed necessary to preserve both human and planetary health. But what is a healthy plant-based diet? How can it be achieved? What are the benefits?



Resources



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Instagram: [@hello_plantbasednurse](#)

THANK YOU