



NUTRITION FACT SHEET

Importance of Protein in Vegetarian Meals

INTRODUCTION

Consuming an adequate amount of protein each day is important to help maintain muscle mass, prevent malnutrition and encourage weight maintenance. Given that muscle wastage and weight loss is a common issue facing the elderly population in aged care homes, it is particularly important to ensure that residents following a vegetarian diet receive adequate amounts of protein from vegetarian sources.



A vegetarian diet can be defined in many different ways, some residents may call themselves vegetarian when they only exclude red meat. Therefore it is important to clarify with the resident their food preferences on admission and documenting this to be aware of which foods can and cannot be included in their diet.

Whilst vegetarian diets can be lower in saturated fat and higher in fibre, they are usually considered lower in protein. Therefore careful planning is required to ensure that meals are balanced and provide adequate amounts of protein. It is important to ensure that residents who choose to follow a vegetarian diet are receiving alternative vegetarian protein sources in their meals. Please see below protein alternatives that can be included in meals and recommended serving size.

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NUTRITION FACT SHEET FOR AGED CARE

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Vegetarian Protein Alternatives	Serving size
Eggs	Two large eggs
Nuts, seeds or peanut butter	30g
Milk (including soy milk)	250mL
Hard cheese	40g (2 slices)
Ricotta	120g (½ cup)
Yoghurt	200g (¾ cup)
Legumes including lentils and beans	150g (1 cup cooked)
Tofu	170g
Quinoa	½ cup cooked

By including these foods into vegetarian meals, it can increase the protein content of the meal significantly, helping the residents achieve their protein goals. For example, lentils and tofu can be added into stir-fry dishes, halloumi cheese can be added to vegetable skewers and ricotta can be included in pasta bake, resulting in a boost in protein content.

Alternatively, vegetarian meals can also be fortified with milk powder to help increase protein content and energy. For example, milk powder can be added into creamy sauces, desserts, cereals, milk based drinks, yoghurts, custards and mashed potato.

Overall, it is possible for residents following a vegetarian diet to meet their daily nutritional requirements including that of protein, however it is important to ensure that adequate amounts of vegetarian protein sources are included in their meals to help the residents achieve their nutritional goals.



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