**MEATLESS IN SINGAPORE**

A hospital, campus and some eateries are offering no-meat meals as healthier options.

**Abigail Ng**

A global initiative encouraging people to give up meat one day a week has been gaining momentum in Singapore.

The campaign, called Meatless Monday, began in 2003 in the United States before taking root in countries such as Australia and Belgium.

Singapore is getting in on the action too. In the past year, Kam pong Serang, a charity and education foundation, launched Green and Healthy Monday, while Khoo Teck Puah Hospital (KTPH) and Yale-NUS College have also started promoting meatless Mondays.

Several Facebook pages are encouraging people to abstain from meat one day a week to boost their health. Some are also taking part in the global campaign.

The motivations behind each campaign differ but organisers recognise the benefits of reducing animal protein intake or even cutting out eggs and dairy products.

A research paper by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics in the US found that a vegetarian diet may provide health benefits for the prevention and treatment of Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and obesity.

Singaporeans love their meat, with each person swallowing down an average of 77kg of meat in 2018, according to the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority. This is much higher than the global average of 41.3kg.

Going meatless also helps the environment. The meat industry generates high amounts of greenhouse gases, while dig of beef takes 55,000 litres of water to produce. This is nearly seven times the amount it takes to produce rice.

At Yale-NUS, the meatless initiative was spearheaded by the Yale-NUS Association for the Protection of Animals from Cruelty. Its president Darelle Chang, 22, said it hoped to raise awareness of problems in factory farms. An environmental group and the college’s South Asian society have also come on board for the push.

Starting this month, each of the college’s three dining halls has been serving a fully vegetarian lunch once a week.

Mr Chang said his group tried to introduce the idea a few years ago but was unsuccessful. However, it now has the support of the new dean of students, who joined last year. Mr Chang said the new dean hoped the institution could make an impact and one way was by cutting its carbon footprint.

President of the student government, Sara Faradilla, 21, describes herself as “quite omnivorous” but the chance to have lunch at whichever dining hall is serving meatless meals for the day.

“The food is very different and healthy,” she said. “I expected it not to be good but it turned out to be very good. It’s guilt-free, so everyone wins.”

Another student, Jessica Ting, 21, said the movement helps to expose students to the vegetarian diet.

“It’s so easy. We have the salad bar and other good vegetarian options in school,” she said.

When The Straits Times visited Yale-NUS, there were dishes such as pumpkin curry, kung pao tofu and black bean curry.

But maintaining a meatless diet is more difficult outside of school because eating places often do not have good vegetarian options.

“This is an important step to change the culture, but more needs to be done,” said Mr Ting.

**SMALL CHANGES**

KTPH became the first local hospital earlier this month to start a campaign to promote the meat-free diet. At a three-day roadshow, 340 people pledged to reduce their meat intake.

Nurses will also encourage patients to choose vegetarian meals.

KTPH dietician Licy Cheng said the hospital hopes people will start to make small changes in their diet.

Together with others in her department, she has also decided not to have meat on Mondays.

Ms Cheng said: “It’s something achievable, but it challenges me. I do enjoy meat but this expands my choices of protein intake.”

Some restaurants here have also adopted the movement by offering discounts on Mondays.

Well-Dressed Salad Bar and Cafe is offering a 50 per cent discount on selected meals and Eight Treasures Vegetarian Restaurant has a one-for-one offer for “sharks fin” soup.

The “fin” is made of funkmyelo jelly.

Both eateries are vegetarian and are managed by Eight Treasures Vegetarian Group.

And local bakery chain Cofee is offering customers $1 off their bill if they order meatless salads (with egg even cheese) or vegetarian salads.

Ms Tricia Lee, who is in her 40s, started a Facebook page, Meatless Mondays in Singapore, to localise the movement. “I wanted to share recipes and places to eat,” she said.

Meanwhile, Kamping Senang’s community partnership manager Vernon Sun said the social enterprise will be holding the second Green And Healthy Festival in August this year. Last October, the festival attracted 6,700 visitors.

Mr Sun said: “We hope to continue promoting green and healthy living in Singapore.”