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Press release
For immediate release

Joint planning of sustainable healthy nutrition in nursing homes
Citizen science project SUNRISE develops a practical guide

Graz, 12 May 2026: How can healthy nutrition in nursing homes meet the needs of older people while being organized according to the principles of sustainability? This is the question asked in the research project SUNRISE—Sustainable healthy NutRition In nurSing homES of the Medical University of Graz Institute of Nursing and Health Sciences. Under the direction of Doris Eglseer, a practical guide for sustainable healthy nutrition in care facilities has been developed in collaboration with residents and staff of a nursing home.

Research in collaboration with residents and staff

A key feature of the project is the citizen science approach: Residents and staff of a Caritas nursing home in the Graz-Seckau diocese are actively participating in data collection, evaluation and interpretation of the findings. "Nursing homes are facing the challenge of combining the special nutritional needs of older people with ecological sustainability. Our goal is to develop solutions that can really be implemented in daily care," explains project leader Doris Eglseer. "The people on site know best what daily life in a nursing home is like. Their experiences and perspectives are critical to the development of measures that truly work," says the researcher.

Ten main factors for sustainable nutrition

The project uses different methods—including photo documentation (Photovoice), interviews and questionnaires—to identify the main factors that influence sustainable nutrition in nursing homes. These include the quality and variety of food, its adapted preparation, a pleasant dining environment, social aspects of eating together and structural conditions such as resources or organization.

The findings reveal that sustainable and healthy nutrition succeeds above all when three main factors are in play: a positive dining environment, the active inclusion of residents and staff and locally based measures such as seasonal and regional food or a reduction in food waste. "It is thoroughly possible to implement sustainable nutrition in nursing homes. What's essential is that all persons involved are included and they develop solutions together," emphasizes Eglseer.

Practical findings: cookbook and photo exhibition

Besides the guide, the project also bore creative fruit: A cookbook was written with the residents and staff that features their favorite recipes. Each recipe includes a tip for how it can be prepared in an even healthier and more sustainable manner. In addition, photographs of daily life in the nursing home document the topic of nutrition and are presented in an exhibition. "The participatory approach increases both the willingness to implement measures as well as the mutual understanding among residents and staff. It gives rise to innovative ideas developed directly out of daily life," says Eglseer.

Final event in May 2026

The findings from the project, which has been funded by the Austrian Scientific Fund (FWF), will be presented at a final event in the Caritas nursing home in St. Peter. Included in the presentation are the guide that was developed—a version for experts and decision-makers and a version for the general public—as well as the cookbook and the accompanying photo exhibition.

Time: 20 May 2026, 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Location: Caritas Pflgewohnhaus St. Peter, Graz

Further information: <https://www.medunigraz.at/kooperationen-forschung/citizen-science/sunrise>

Further information and contact

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#Healthy Aging

Healthy Aging at Med Uni Graz—Research, Education and Practice in Dialog.

Profile: Doris Eglseer

Doris Eglseer is a dietitian and scientist at the Medical University of Graz. In her research and teaching, she is concerned with nutrition in old age and its significance for the health, well-being and quality of life of older people. Her work focuses on translating scientific findings into practical concepts for the daily practice of nursing and care. In lectures, seminars and training programs for health care professionals, she raises awareness of nutritional needs in old age. Combining an evidence-based approach with practical recommendations, she shows how an individually tailored diet can help sustainably improve the quality of life of older people.