

New care and retirement living survey highlights preference for human-led service supported by technological solutions and demand for customised, freshly prepared food

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Despite the rapid rise in digital tools and artificial intelligence, a new survey by [Caterplus](#), a leading provider of catering services to care homes and retirement living communities, reveals that although technology is seen as a potential enhancement to care, the overwhelming majority of respondents prioritise human-led interactions in care environments.

The survey obtained insight into the attitudes and preferences of 3,000 respondents, aged between 45 and 75, who may or may not already be living in care home and retirement living accommodation across the UK. The indication of desire for personalised food options, human interaction, and freshly prepared meals as a result of the survey reinforces that care recipients value a personal, human-led approach to their wellbeing which is supported by digital solutions.

This marks a shift from a previous survey carried out by Caterplus in 2018, when 63% of respondents expected future care interactions to be primarily human-led rather than tech-led. Today that expectation has increased, with a clear demand by 95% of respondents for care to be delivered by people, with technology playing a supportive, rather than dominant role.

Caterplus already bolsters its care offering for its residents with a number of digital innovations and

enhancements including: Bellabot, a robot that helps to deliver food trays and clear tables; a digital ordering app that reflects a growing need for convenience from residents; and Mobi Magic Tables, portable interactive projection systems that turn any surface into a sensory experience with over 150 interactive activities. Technology has also improved staff training, with the Microsoft HoloLens 2 aiding care workers in the creation of texture-modified foods for residents.

Key survey findings:

- Demand for personal dining options:
90% of respondents want a personalised dining experience, with an emphasis on freshly prepared meals by 62% and a strong desire for a variety of food choices.
- Sustainability remains a priority:
Over 50% of respondents expect sustainable practices, such as reducing food waste, increasing recycling efforts and improving energy efficiency. However, this focus on sustainability has remained steady since 2018, showing no significant change in consumer expectations.
- Generational differences in food preferences:
The survey highlights a contrast in food preferences between different age groups. While 35% of respondents aged 65-75 favour traditional British dishes, only 17% of younger respondents aged between 45 and 54 share this preference. This suggests a potential decline in demand for British cuisine in future years, with an increasing appetite for global flavours.
- Beverage and snack preferences:
Tea continues to be the top drink of choice for 60% of respondents while fruit and biscuits rank as the top two preferred snacks. The demand for alcohol has decreased since 2018, from 67% to 62%, reflecting changing consumer habits.

Michal Seal, managing director of Caterplus, said: “This survey has provided us with invaluable insight into what current and future residents in care homes and retirement living accommodation desire in relation to catering and other services. As the market leader, we feel a sense of responsibility to bring improvements to the way we care for and feed residents – the survey was an important step in achieving these ambitions as well as helping maintain our excellent service.”

“We believe that food should be more than mere sustenance and should be a daily pleasure that is nourishing and plays an important role in fostering community. We recognise the importance of technology to enhance the care we provide and we also view it as a way to provide a better service, but not to replace critical human interaction.”

Download your copy of the [‘Trends shaping the care and retirement environments of tomorrow report’](#).