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## **CAREERS IN HUMAN NUTRITION/DIETETICS**

Thank you for your interest in the field of nutrition. Your interest only supports the fact that diet can play a significant role in both the treatment of disease and in the maintenance of health. Because of this there are job opportunities for people with a background in nutrition and dietetics. The need is further fueled by the growing and aging population, increased public interest in nutrition, and the food industry's desire to meet public demand for a wider variety of nutritious products. What follows is an outline of career options in nutrition and dietetics and the educational requirements associated with them.

### CLINICAL DIETETICS PRACTICE

A person in a clinical practice would be what is known as a "registered dietitian" or "RD" (see educational requirements), and would most likely be employed by a hospital, nursing home, physician or physicians' group, or out patient health clinic. Responsibilities would include conducting medical nutrition therapy for the treatment and control of a disease or condition. A clinical dietitian could see a wide variety of patients, or might specialize in one particular area, such as pediatric nutrition, renal medical nutrition therapy, or nutritional support in critical care. Most states will require licensure to practice medical nutrition therapy in the state (see educational requirements).

### COMMUNITY/PUBLIC HEALTH

A person in a community-based position could be a registered dietitian, public health nutritionist or nutrition educator and might be working in a health maintenance organization, health or athletic club, wellness center, or for a public health-related government agency or advocacy group at the local, state or federal level. Some states may require licensure for such positions (see educational requirements). Responsibilities would vary from developing and providing nutrition education and chronic disease prevention programs to overseeing food or nutrition assistance programs such as congregate meal sites for the elderly or WIC (Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children).

### FOOD SERVICE MANAGEMENT:

A food service manager coordinates the selection, purchasing, preparation, and serving of food in hospitals, cafeterias, restaurants, nursing homes, correctional facilities, schools, or hotels to name a few. This person may or may not be a registered dietitian (those in hospitals often are; however others, such as those in nursing homes, may use RD's as consultants).

### CONSULTING/PRIVATE PRACTICE

Registered dietitians, with or without postgraduate degrees, can provide outpatient nutrition counseling, often via referrals from physicians. Again, some states may require licensure as outlined below. The consultant may specialize in one area, such as weight loss or maintenance, or offer a broader range of services that could include the management of diabetes or hypertension. Some work with professional actors or athletes, including football teams and even race car pit crews.

## RESEARCH/TEACHING/EXTENSION

Individuals with a master's or doctoral degree in nutrition can find research positions in association with government agencies, and at medical centers or universities. For those with a PhD, the latter opportunities would include tenure track academic appointments. The type of research runs the gamut from laboratory-based experiments with cell lines or experimental animals, to clinical trials with human subjects or nutrition education interventions. Opportunities also exist in the food industry where research is necessary for the development of new products.

Teaching appointments at the university level typically require a PhD, however positions may be available at smaller colleges for which a master's degree is adequate. At the university level, most tenure-track teaching positions would also include research or cooperative extension responsibilities.

The Cooperative Extension Service is an agency within the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) which serves as a link between the research community and the public, converting the latest findings from the former into practical applications for the consumer. It is, as its name implies, actually a "cooperative" association among the federal government, state land-grant universities and the counties within a state. Extension "educators" or field faculty, typically serve one or more counties; they may be responsible for nutrition-related programming only, or other family or health areas as well. Foods and Nutrition Extension "specialists" are faculty members at a university who provide training for the extension educators and help them carry out and evaluate the programs the specialists have developed to meet identified needs. Specialists are also likely to be doing applied research.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS/CONSUMER AFFAIRS/MARKETING

Nutritionists or RD's hold jobs in the public relations and marketing departments of a variety of organizations including food companies (Dole, Kelloggs, Heinz, etc.), commodity groups (the Meat Board, Dairy council, Wheat Industry Council, etc.) and major restaurant and supermarket chains (McDonalds, Kroger, etc.). Responsibilities are likely to include developing print and audio or visual promotional and educational materials as well as making presentations to other trade and professional organizations.

## THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Although many of the government jobs have already been mentioned, they deserve a heading of their own as well because they are so numerous. Agencies employing nutritionists or RD's include the two primary overseers of the nation's food supply - the USDA and the FDA - as well as the Food and Nutrition Board of the Institute of Medicine (part of the National Academy of Sciences), the Centers for Disease Control, and the National Institutes of Health and its member agencies such as the National Cancer Institute and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. The types of jobs vary widely, from monitoring food production or nutrient intake, to producing educational materials, to developing food-related legislation or nutrient intake recommendations, to doing basic or applied research.

## OTHER TYPES OF POSITIONS

Job opportunities that don't fit neatly under any particular heading include working for a software company that develops diet/food composition analysis programs, writing nutrition-related columns for a national health or women's magazine or newsletter or working with a private, non-profit health promotion or disease prevention organization such as the American Heart Association or the American Cancer Society.

## EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

There are a variety of educational paths one can take to become a registered dietitian or nutritionist as outlined below.

### Becoming a registered dietitian or RD

The RD certification is administered through the Commission on Dietetics Registration (CDR) through the American Dietetics Association (ADA). The Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education (CADE) is also involved by determining the competencies that a person must have to be eligible to become an RD. It is a 3-step process:

1. Complete a minimum of a bachelor's degree at a US accredited university or college and complete course work approved or accredited by CADE. These are known as the Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD). RD's study a wide range of subjects, including anatomy, physiology, microbiology, biochemistry, food science, nutrition sciences, behavioral and social sciences, techniques of food preparation, business and economics.
2. Complete 960 clock hours of a post baccalaureate degree internship accredited by CADE. This is a supervised practice program at a healthcare facility, community agency or food service corporation. The dietetic intern receives training in medical nutrition therapy, food service management, and community nutrition. These programs are typically coordinated through a college or university. At some institutions this experience may be combined with an undergraduate or graduate program.
3. Pass the CDR's registration examination for dietitians.

A directory of all the dietetic programs across the country is available from the ADA by calling 800-877-1600, ext. 5000, or by visiting their web site at: [http://www.eatright.org/Public/7782\\_13284.cfm](http://www.eatright.org/Public/7782_13284.cfm)

The majority of DPD programs are at the undergraduate level. However, if you already have a bachelor's degree that is not in dietetics you can have the director of a DPD evaluate your transcript to determine what additional courses you would need to meet the competencies to be eligible to apply to a dietetic internship. It may even be possible to complete these requirements while you are in graduate school. However, policies and procedures can vary widely from program to program so it is important to check with each program separately AND to contact more than one. Additional course work requirements at the graduate level can range from five to fifteen credits depending on the program and courses completed for the bachelor's degree.

### Graduate Degrees in Nutrition

Degrees in nutrition are available at both the undergraduate and graduate level at many colleges and universities around the country. One need not get a bachelors degree in nutrition however to go on to graduate school; a related field such as food science, animal science, biological sciences, biochemistry, or zoology can provide good training for an advanced degree in nutrition. Graduate degrees are required for some public health and most managerial, academic and research positions. The ADA provides a listing of graduate nutrition programs at its web site: [http://www.eatright.org/Public/7782\\_13288.cfm](http://www.eatright.org/Public/7782_13288.cfm)

Note that most graduate programs with a clinical or public health focus (as opposed to basic research) will want students to have already demonstrated an understanding of and commitment to the field through nutrition-related volunteer or paid experiences, so it is important to look for these opportunities while in college.

## LICENSURE

Many states have passed laws regulating the use of the terms "dietitian" and "nutritionist." The laws vary some from state to state so it is important to contact either your state's ADA office or look under the Licensing Board heading in the state government listings.

Many states require those at the Master's and bachelors level to be RDs in order to be licensed. Therefore, it has become increasingly important for those interested in a career in nutrition to think seriously about becoming a registered dietitian, as not being licensed may limit your job options as indicated above. Even those considering a job in academia must recognize that many of those positions are likely to be in departments with undergraduate didactic programs that will be looking for professors with RD certification to teach their courses.

## WEB SITES OF INTEREST

You can find more information about careers and educational opportunities at the following web sites.

The American Dietetics Association web site at: <http://www.eatright.org/Public/Careers/94.cfm>

The American Society for Nutritional Science at <http://www.asns.org/graddir/gradframe.html>. From this page there are direct links to graduate programs in each state. The best thing to do is to then contact the programs that interest you.

A handbook was developed to help people decide on career paths in nutrition. "Untangling the Nutrition Web in Career Development" can be found at <http://www.nutritioncareers.com>. An extensive chart in the book visually shows how skills and interests in nutrition can be paired with many other skills and interests to create very unusual careers. There is an order form available at <http://www.nutritioncareers.com/ordering.html> and you can read a review at <http://www.nutritioncareers.com/snereview.htm>.

Good luck with finding a program that's right for you.