

# Careers in Nutrition and Dietetics

## Becoming a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist

### Educational and professional requirements

Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs) are food and nutrition experts who have met the following criteria and earned the RDN credential:

**Completed a minimum of a bachelor's degree** at a U.S. regionally accredited university or college or foreign equivalent, and coursework through an Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) accredited Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD or Coordinated Program in Dietetics (CP). For a list of accredited programs, see [www.eatright.org/acend](http://www.eatright.org/acend). Effective 1/1/2024, a master's degree will be required.

**Completed 1200 hours of supervised practice** through an ACEND accredited Dietetic Internship, Coordinated Program in Dietetics or an Individualized Supervised Practice Pathway (ISPP) offered through an ACEND accredited program. For a list of accredited programs, see [www.eatright.org/acend](http://www.eatright.org/acend).

**Passed a national examination** administered by the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR). For more information regarding the examination, refer to CDR's Website at [www.cdrnet.org](http://www.cdrnet.org). In order to maintain the credential, an RDN must complete continuing professional educational requirements.

Some RDNs hold additional certifications in specialized areas of practice. These are awarded through CDR, the credentialing agency for the Academy, and/or through other medical and nutrition organizations. These certifications are recognized within the profession, but not required. Some of the certifications include pediatric or renal nutrition, sports dietetics, oncology, gerontological, nutrition support and diabetes education.

In addition, many states have regulatory laws (i.e. licensure) for food and nutrition practitioners. All states accept the RDN credential for state licensure purposes.

### College course work

Dietetics students study a variety of subjects, including food and nutrition sciences, biochemistry, physiology, microbiology, anatomy, chemistry, foodservice systems, business, pharmacology, culinary arts, behavioral social sciences and communication.

### Employment opportunities

RDNs work in a wide variety of settings, including health care, business and industry, community/public health, education, research, government agencies and private practice. Many work environments, particularly those in medical and health-care settings, require that an individual be credentialed as an RDN.

#### RDNs work in:

- o **Hospitals, clinics or other health-care facilities**, educating patients about nutrition and administering medical nutrition therapy as part of the health-care team. They may also manage the foodservice operations in these settings, or schools, day-care centers or correctional facilities, overseeing everything from food purchasing and preparation to managing staff.
- o **Sports nutrition and corporate wellness programs**, educating clients about the connection between food, fitness and health.
- o **Food and nutrition-related business and industries**, working in communications, consumer affairs, public relations, marketing, product development or consulting with chefs in restaurants and culinary schools.
- o **Private practice**, working under contract with healthcare or food companies, or in their own business. RDNs work with foodservice or restaurant managers, food vendors and distributors, athletes, nursing home residents or company employees.
- o **Community and public health settings**, teaching, monitoring and advising the public and helping improve quality of life through healthy eating habits.
- o **Universities and medical centers**, teaching physician's assistants, nurses, dietetics students, dentists and others about the sophisticated science of food and nutrition.
- o **Research areas** in food and pharmaceutical companies, universities and hospitals directing or conducting experiments to answer critical nutrition questions and find alternative foods or nutrition recommendations for the public.

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## Where to start if you already have a degree:

If you already have a bachelor's degree that is not in dietetics and are interested in becoming a registered dietitian, have your college transcript evaluated by the director of the ACEND-accredited dietetic program you wish to attend.

The program director will review your previous academic preparation and identify courses that you will need to complete to meet the educational requirements for dietetic registration. It may be possible to complete the required dietetic coursework while enrolled in a graduate program. The dietetic program director can advise you of your options. Once the required coursework is completed, you are eligible to apply to the ACEND-accredited supervised practice program.

## Salaries and job outlook

According to the *2015 Compensation & Benefits Survey of the Dietetics Profession*, salaries for RDNS have increased steadily over time. RDNs earned a median annualized salary of \$63,700 in 2015. As with any profession, salaries and fees vary by region of the country, employment settings, scope of responsibility and supply of RDNs. Salaries increase with experience and many RDNs, particularly those in business, management, education and research earn incomes above \$100,000.

According to the *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, employment of dietitian nutritionists is expected to grow faster than average for all occupations through the year 2022 because of the increased emphasis on disease prevention, a growing and aging population and public interest in food and nutrition.

## Financial aid

There are many resources to help students pay for college. You may be able to obtain a grant or scholarship from a corporation, community or civic group, philanthropic or religious organization or directly from your chosen school or college. Federal grants and low-interest loans may also be available.

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation offers scholarships to encourage eligible students to enter the field of dietetics. Student members of the Academy enrolled in their junior year in an ACEND-accredited program may apply for a Foundation scholarship. Scholarships are also available for student members in ACEND-accredited dietetic internships and graduate studies. Contact the Academy's Accreditation and Education Programs Team (800/877-1600, ext. 5400 or [education@eatright.org](mailto:education@eatright.org)) for scholarship information.

## Need more information?

Go to [www.eatrightpro.org](http://www.eatrightpro.org) and click on "EatRight Careers" for more information. The site also lists the dietetics education programs accredited by ACEND at [www.eatright.org/acend](http://www.eatright.org/acend).

For other career guidance information, contact the Accreditation and Education Programs Team (800/877-1600, ext. 5400 or [education@eatright.org](mailto:education@eatright.org)).

## Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

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The **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics** is the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. The Academy is committed to improving the nation's health and advancing the profession of dietetics through research, education and advocacy.