



**CELEBRATE NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH AND REGISTERED DIETITIAN (RD) DAY
WITH THE TRUE NUTRITION EXPERTS**

The month of March is designated as National Nutrition Month and this year's theme is "Put Your Best Fork Forward". March 8th was Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) Day and many dietitians in our state will be continuing the celebration all month long. Want to learn more about who dietitians are and the work they do? Continue reading to find out why registered dietitians are the TRUE nutrition experts!

RDNs COMPLETE A FORMAL DEGREE IN NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

To become a registered dietitian one must first complete a 4-year Bachelor's degree through an accredited university. Coursework includes chemistry, anatomy and physiology, food science, and biochemistry courses, among the many other requirements to lay the foundation of knowledge necessary for dietetics. Following that, there is a rigorous application process to match with a dietetic internship (DI). The DI is comparable to residency for physicians, but our version consists of a minimum of 1200 supervised hours under the guidance of a preceptor. While some programs offer small stipends, most are unpaid. Most take 6 to 12 months to complete, at which point interns are eligible to sit for the registration exam through the Commission on Dietetic Registration. This agency also oversees the continuing education requirements for dietitians (minimum is 75 CPEUs or continuing professional education units during each 5 year period). Continuing education may be completed by attending conferences, participating in webinars or seminars, or specialized programming designed to offer additional education and training in a specific area of dietetics. Additionally, many states require a license to legally practice dietetics and use the "Registered Dietitian" credential.

There are many nutritionists who have completed some or part of these requirements, but the term "registered" or "licensed" dietitian is an indicator that someone has met these strict standards and agrees to follow ethical guidelines. The goal of regulating these terms is all about consumer protection. Because registered dietitians have a deep understanding of physiology, anatomy, biochemistry, and medical nutrition therapy (MNT), they are qualified to deliver interventions that are evidence-based and proven to

be safe for their patients and clients. This is critical for treating or managing serious and chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular conditions, food allergies/sensitivities (plus many more) through nutrition, diet, and lifestyle.

WHERE DO DIETITIANS WORK?

The field of dietetics is incredibly diverse and many dietitians cite this as one of the reasons they chose to pursue a career that revolves around nutrition. There are several niche areas where the majority of dietitians may be found. They include:

- **Clinical settings:** Dietitians work in both inpatient and outpatient settings, clinics, long-term care facilities, and rehab hospitals.
- **Food-Service Management:** You can also find dietitians working in cafeterias in hospitals, on college campuses, primary and secondary schools, or other large- or small-scale food production facilities.
- **Community Nutrition:** Non-profit organizations, government-funded programs, or local health departments are just a few examples of where dietitians may be found in your community.
- **Sports Nutrition:** Dietitians may be hired by or contract with professional sports teams, colleges and universities, or club teams to provide athletes with the nutrition guidance they need to perform their best.
- **Academia and Research:** Dietitians are an important part of team involved in designing and conducting nutrition and health research. Additionally, these dietitians may also serve as professors or instructors to educate the next generation of health care professionals.
- **Private Practice:** Many dietitians are also entrepreneurs who form their own businesses to provide consulting services, freelance writing, or other work in the field of dietetics.

As you can see, the field of dietetics is extremely diverse – many dietitians will work in multiple areas over the course of their career and gain expertise in many facets of human nutrition and health.

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO WORK WITH A DIETITIAN?

Wondering what you'll get if you do choose to work with a dietitian? It could be the best partnership you ever commit to when it comes to your health.

A dietitian is....	A dietitian is not....
A highly qualified, credentialed health professional with expertise in the areas of food, nutrition, and health	Someone who read a few books, browsed online, or perhaps completed a brief online training to earn a printable certificate
Someone who will learn about you, your food likes and dislikes, your personal and medical history, lifestyle, goals, and values, then work with you to craft sustainable changes and support you in working towards those goals	Someone who hands you a meal plan and sends you on your way
Non-judgmental, patient, and kind	A number-obsessed food Nazi critiquing your food choices
Registered with a national credentialing agency and licensed to practice who understands and respects their scope of practice	A personal trainer, health coach, life coach, chiropractor, yoga teacher, nurse, or physician (although if any of these wanted to be a dietitian, they can complete the same education requirements needed to do so)
Sometimes vastly underpaid	Someone working for a commission in a multi-level marketing gig
Creative enough to find alternative solutions for challenges and barriers, or to teach complex ideas in new ways	Handing out brochures or regurgitating programs without due diligence and evidence that it's safe and effective
Adherent to a professional code of ethics and standards, all in the interest of professional integrity and most importantly, patient safety	Cherry picking data to conform to a personal bias or misinterpreting science and research to prove their own theories about diet and lifestyle
Able to set aside personal food preferences and biases to meet someone where they're at	A fearmongerer, jumping on the fad-train or recommending their methods because it "worked for them"

And if nothing else, please remember **all dietitians are nutritionists but not all nutritionists are dietitians.**

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