# Careers in Nutrition and Dietetics

Academy of 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 master's degree granted** by a college or university accredited by a U.S. Department of Education (USDE) recognized accrediting agency or foreign equivalent, and coursework through an Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) accredited Didactic (DPD), Coordinated (CP), Graduate Program (GP) or Foreign (FDE) program. For a list of accredited programs, see www.eatrightpro.org/acend.
- **Completed required supervised practice/experience** through an ACEND-accredited Dietetic Internship (DI), Coordinated (CP), Graduate Program (GP), or an Individualized Supervised Practice Pathway (ISPP) offered through an ACEND-accredited program. Information on ACEND-accredited programs is at www.eatrightpro.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. 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

Nutrition and 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:**

- **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.
- **Sports nutrition and corporate wellness programs,** educating clients about the connection between food, fitness and health.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Community and public health settings,** teaching, monitoring, and advising the public and helping improve quality of life through healthy eating habits.
- **Universities and medical centers,** teaching physician's assistants, nurses, dietetics students, dentists, and others about the sophisticated science of food and nutrition.
- **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 and/or master's degree that is not in nutrition and dietetics and are interested in becoming a registered dietitian, have your college transcript evaluated by the director of the ACEND-accredited nutrition and dietetics 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 and supervised practice/ experiential learning requirements to be eligible to take the credentialing examination to become a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN).

## Salaries and job outlook

According to the *2021 Compensation & Benefits Survey of the Dietetics Profession*, the median full-time salary of all RDNs equates to $72,000 per year. 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 $90,000. For more information, see the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics 2021 Compensation and Benefits Survey of the Dietetics Profession.

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of dietitians is projected to grow 7% from 2021-2031, as fast as the average for all occupations, because of the increased emphasis on the role of food and nutrition in preventing and treating diseases, a growing and aging population and public interest in 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 nutrition and 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) for scholarship information.

## Need more information?

Go to www.eatrightpro.org and click on "Careers" for more information. The site also lists the nutrition and dietetics education programs accredited by ACEND at **www.eatrightpro.org/acend**.

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

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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.

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