

Careers in Dietetics

Becoming a Registered Dietitian or Registered Dietitian Nutritionist

Educational and professional requirements

Registered Dietitians (RDs) or Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs) are food and nutrition experts who have met the following criteria and earned the RD or 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).
- **Complete 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.
- **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.cdnet.org. In order to maintain the credential, an RD or RDN must complete continuing professional educational requirements.

Some RDs or 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 RD or 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

RDs or 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 RD or RDN.

RDs or 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. RDs or 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 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 *2011 Compensation & Benefits Survey of the Dietetics Profession*, the median annual income of all RDs or RDNs in the U.S. who have been working in the field for four years or less was \$52,000. As with any profession, salaries and fees vary by region of the country, employment settings, scope of responsibility and supply of RDs or RDNs. Salaries increase with year of experience and many RDs or RDNs, particularly those in business, management, education and research earn incomes above \$90,000.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of dietitians is expected to grow as fast as the average for all occupations through the year 2014 because of the increased emphasis on disease prevention, a growing and aging population and public interest in nutrition. Employment in hospitals is expected to show little change because of anticipated slow growth and reduced lengths of hospital stay. Faster growth, however, is anticipated in nursing homes, residential care facilities and physician clinics.

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) for scholarship information.

Need more information?

Go to www.eatright.org and click on "Become an RD/RDN/DTR" for more information. The site also lists the dietetics education programs accredited by ACEND at www.eatright.org/acend.

For other career guidance information, contact the Accreditation and Education Programs Team.

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Accreditation and Education Programs Team
120 South Riverside Plaza, Suite 2000
Chicago, Illinois 60606-6995
Phone: 800/877-1600, ext. 5400
Fax: 312/899-4817
E-mail: education@eatright.org

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.