

# Dietetics

## Includes:

- Registered dietitian/nutritionist
- Dietetic technician, registered

## Registered Dietitian/Nutritionist



### Career Description

Dietetics is the science of applying food and nutrition to health. Registered Dietitians are nutritionists who integrate and apply the principles derived from the sciences of food, nutrition, biochemistry, physiology, food management, and behavior to achieve and maintain the health status of the public they serve.



### Employment Characteristics

*Clinical registered dietitians* are a vital part of the medical team in hospitals, nursing homes, health maintenance organizations, and other health care facilities. As a key member of the health care team, the clinical RD provides medical nutrition therapy and the use of specific nutrition services to treat chronic conditions, illnesses, or injuries. Opportunities for advancement are available by choosing a particular area of nutrition practice, such as diabetes, heart disease, or pediatrics, or by expanding into hospital administration.

*Community registered dietitians* work in public and home health agencies, day care centers, health and recreation clubs, and in government-funded programs that feed and counsel families, the elderly, pregnant women, children, and individuals with special needs. Wherever proper nutrition can help improve quality of life, community RDs reach out to the public to teach, monitor, and advise.

*Educator registered dietitians* work in colleges, universities, and medical centers, teaching future physicians, nurses, dietitians, and dietetic technicians the science of foods and nutrition.

*Research registered dietitians* work in government agencies, food and pharmaceutical companies, and major universities and medical centers. They conduct or direct experiments to answer critical nutrition questions, find alternative foods, and form dietary recommendations for the public.

*Consultant registered dietitians* work under contract with health care or food companies or in their own business. In private practice, they perform nutrition screening and assessment of their own clients and those referred to them by physicians. They counsel on weight loss, cholesterol reduction, and a variety of other diet-related concerns. Those under contract with health care facilities consult with food service or restaurant managers, food vendors or distributors, athletes, nursing home residents, or company employees.

*Management registered dietitians* work in health care institutions, schools, cafeterias, and restaurants, playing a key role where food is served. They are responsible for personnel management, menu planning, budgeting, and purchasing.

*Business registered dietitians* work in food- and nutrition-related industries, in such areas as communications, consumer affairs, product development, sales, marketing, advertising, and public relations.



### Salary

According to the American Dietetic Association (ADA) 2007 Dietetics Compensation and Benefits Survey, among registered dietitians employed full time in dietetics in their primary position for less than 5 years, half earn between \$42,000 and \$55,000 per year. Salary levels may vary with location, scope of responsibility, and supply of job applicants. Salary also increases as experience increases; many RDs, particularly those in management and business earn incomes between \$60,000 and \$91,000 per year. Refer to Section IV, Table 5 of this *Directory* for more information, or see [www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary](http://www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary).



### Employment Outlook

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of dietitians is expected to grow faster than the average profession through the year 2015, especially in the community, consulting, and business areas.



### Educational Programs

**Length.** The professional component is a minimum of 2 years at the baccalaureate or graduate degree level. Postbaccalaureate dietetic internship programs vary from 6 months to 2 years, depending on study design and integration in a graduate program. Following completion of academic and supervised practice requirements, individuals are eligible to take a national certification examination for registered dietitians. Most states also regulate dietitians and nutritionists. National certification as a RD will meet state requirements.

**Prerequisites.** Variable for programs at the baccalaureate and graduate degree levels, depending on the degree offered and institutional requirements. Applicants to postbaccalaureate dietetic internship programs must have completed a baccalaureate degree from a US regionally accredited college or university or equivalent foreign degree and Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education (CADE)-approved didactic coursework.

**Curriculum.** Didactic curriculum requirements focus on food and nutrition sciences and management, supported by the physical and biological as well as behavioral and social sciences, in addition to business, economics, and communication. The supervised practice curriculum provides experiences to develop the skills and competence to practice dietetics.

### Program Types

#### *Coordinated Program in Dietetics (CP)*

- An academic program in a regionally accredited college or university granting a baccalaureate or graduate degree
- Includes didactic instruction and a minimum of 900 hours of supervised practice experiences, which may be planned concurrently with or following the didactic component
- Graduates are eligible to write the registration examination for dietitians

#### *Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD)*

- An academic program in a regionally accredited college or university granting a baccalaureate or graduate degree
- Graduates can apply for a dietetic internship program leading to eligibility to write the registration examination for dietitians

#### *Dietetic Internship (DI)*

- A supervised practice program sponsored by a health care facility, college or university, federal or state agency, business, or corporation
- Minimum of 900 hours of supervised practice experiences
- Entry requires completion of CADE-approved Didactic Program in Dietetics and at least a baccalaureate degree from a US regionally accredited college or university or foreign equivalent
- May be full-time or part-time and vary from 6 months to 2 years
- Graduates are eligible to write the registration examination for dietitians

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## Dietetic Technician, Registered



### Career Description

Dietetic technicians assist in shaping the public's food choices and provide nutrition assessment and counseling to persons with illnesses or injuries. Technicians work under the supervision of the registered dietitian. They often screen patients to identify nutrition problems, provide patient education and counseling to individuals and groups, develop menus and recipes, supervise food service personnel, purchase food, and monitor inventory and food quality.



### Employment Characteristics

As an integral part of the nutrition care team, dietetic technicians work with registered dietitians in a number of different settings, such as hospitals, public health nutrition programs, and long-term care facilities. Technicians also work in child nutrition and school lunch programs, community wellness centers, health clubs, nutrition programs for the elderly, food companies, restaurants, and food service management.



### Salary

According to the ADA's 2007 Dietetics compensation and benefit survey, half of all registered dietetic technicians employed full-time in their primary position for 5 years or less earn annual incomes of between \$30,000 and \$40,000. Salary levels may vary based on location, scope of responsibility, and supply of DTRs. Refer to Section IV, Table 5 of this *Directory* for more information, or see [www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary](http://www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary).



### Educational Programs

**Length.** Two years (associate degree), combining classroom and supervised practical experience, at a US regionally accredited college or university. After

completing this program, individuals are eligible to take the registration examination for dietetic technicians. Those who pass the exam become Dietetic Technicians, Registered, and can use the initials "DTR" after their names.

**Prerequisites.** Applicants must have a high school diploma or equivalency and must meet institutional entrance requirements.

**Curriculum.** Didactic instruction and a minimum of 450 hours of supervised practice experiences make up the curriculum. Food, nutrition, and management courses are emphasized, supported by the sciences, especially biology, anatomy, and chemistry. Mathematics, English, sociology, psychology, communications, and business courses are also important.



### Inquiries

#### Careers

Inquiries regarding careers in dietetics and nutrition should be addressed to:

Accreditation and Education Programs  
American Dietetic Association  
120 S Riverside Plaza, Suite 2000  
Chicago, IL 60606-6995  
312 899-0040, Ext 5400  
E-mail: [education@eatright.org](mailto:education@eatright.org)

#### Certification/Registration

Inquiries regarding dietitian and dietetic technician registration should be addressed to:

Commission on Dietetic Registration  
120 S Riverside Plaza, Suite 2000  
Chicago, IL 60606-6995  
312 899-0040, Ext 5500  
E-mail: [cdr@eatright.org](mailto:cdr@eatright.org)

#### Program Accreditation and Approval

Accreditation and Education Programs  
American Dietetic Association  
120 S Riverside Plaza, Suite 2000  
Chicago, IL 60606-6995  
312 899-0040, Ext 5400  
E-mail: [education@eatright.org](mailto:education@eatright.org)

#### Accredited and Approved Programs

A list of accredited and approved programs with selected information is available on the ADA Web site at: [www.eatright.org/cade](http://www.eatright.org/cade)