

# Check it Out

## Becoming a Registered Dietitian: A Food and Nutrition Expert

### Educational and professional requirements

Registered Dietitians (RDs) are food and nutrition experts who have met the following criteria to earn the RD credential:

- **Completed a minimum of a bachelor's degree** at a U.S. regionally accredited university or college and course work accredited or approved by the Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education (CADE) of the American Dietetic Association (ADA).
- **Completed a CADE-accredited supervised practice program** at a health-care facility, community agency, or a foodservice corporation or combined with undergraduate or graduate studies. Typically, a practice program will run six to 12 months in length.
- **Passed a national examination** administered by the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR). For more information regarding the examination, refer to CDR's Web site at [www.cdrnet.org](http://www.cdrnet.org).
- **Completed continuing professional educational requirements** to maintain registration.

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

In addition to RD credentialing, many states have regulatory laws for dietitians and nutrition practitioners. Frequently these state requirements are met through the same education and training required to become an RD.

### College course work

Dietitians study a variety of subjects, ranging from food and nutrition sciences, foodservice systems management, business, economics, computer science, culinary arts, sociology and communication to science courses such as biochemistry, physiology, microbiology, anatomy and chemistry.

### Employment opportunities

Registered dietitians work in a wide variety of employment 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.

### RDs work in:

- **Hospitals, HMO's 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, as well as in schools, day-care centers and correctional facilities, over-seeing 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 health-care or food companies, or in their own business. RDs may provide services to foodservice or restaurant managers, food vendors and distributors or athletes, nursing home residents or company employees.
- **Community and public health settings**, teaching, monitoring and advising the public and helping improve their quality of life through healthy eating habits.
- **Universities and medical centers**, teaching physician's assistants, nurses, dietetics students, dentists and others the sophisticated science of foods 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.

### **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, you should have your college transcript evaluated by a director of a dietetics program accredited or approved by CADE. Because the policies, procedures and costs for the transcript evaluation may vary from one institution to another, you may want to contact more than one dietetics program for further information.

The program director will evaluate your previous academic preparation and identify the courses that you will need to complete at that school to meet the educational requirements for dietetic registration. It may be possible to complete the required dietetics coursework while enrolled in a graduate program. The dietetics program director can advise you of your options.

Once the required coursework is completed, you are eligible to apply to a CADE-accredited supervised practice program.

### **Salaries and job outlook**

According to ADA's 2007 Dietetics Compensation and Benefits survey, half of all RDs in the U.S. who have been working in the field for five years or less earn between \$42,000 and \$55,000 per year. As with any profession, salaries and fees vary by region of the country, employment settings, scope of responsibility and supply of RDs. Salaries increase with years of experience and many RDs, particularly those in management, business and consulting earn incomes above \$86,000.

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 in need 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 the school or college you are interested in attending. Federal grants and low-interest loans may also be available.

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

### **Need more information?**

ADA's Web site ([www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)), includes additional information about careers in dietetics. Access this information directly at [www.eatright.org/careers.html](http://www.eatright.org/careers.html). The site also lists the dietetics education programs accredited or approved by CADE at [www.eatright.org/cade](http://www.eatright.org/cade).

For other career guidance information, contact ADA's Accreditation and Education Programs Team.

### **American Dietetic Association**

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The American Dietetic Association is the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. ADA is committed to improving the nation's health and advancing the profession of dietetics through research, education and advocacy.