

A Guide to Dietetics

Dietetics is the science of nutrition, or how food and other nutrients are used by the body for growth and repair. It is also the study of how nutrients can help the body prevent or manage both acute and chronic disease. Dietitians are a source of quality nutrition information and counseling.

You may want to seek information from a dietetic professional for minor weight loss or weight gain, transitioning to a vegetarian lifestyle, nutrition during pregnancy, supporting athletic performance, or for other basic needs. Dietetic professionals determine the nature of your questions and your goals, and provide a suggested diet plan that takes into account your unique needs, including lifestyle, level of activity, health goals, motivation level, and food likes and dislikes. You may also have a medical condition that will benefit from nutrition counseling.

Dietitians use a variety of methods to assist you in reaching your desired health status. For instance, if you want to add more plant-based foods into your diet, a dietitian may suggest how and where to shop for these foods and offer suggestions for how to order when you eat out. In addition to individual counseling sessions, some dietitians may offer body composition analysis and a computerized diet analysis.

Dietitians are educated in the science of nutrition at an accredited university and hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree. Courses include physiology, anatomy, and the pathology of disease. Dietitians spend a minimum of 900 hours after graduation in a clinical training setting, after which they are eligible to take a national registration exam. Upon successful completion of the exam, they receive the Registered Dietitian (RD) designation. Registered Dietitians make up the largest group of dietetics professionals in the United States.

The information provided in this article is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice or health care. Always seek the advice of your physician before beginning any new treatment or fitness program or if you have questions regarding a medical condition.