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For 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:

- ➔ *Complete a minimum of a bachelor's degree* at a US regionally accredited university or college and course work approved by the [Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education \(CADE\)](#) of the American Dietetic Association (ADA).
- ➔ *Complete a CADE-accredited supervised practice program* at a healthcare facility, community agency, or a foodservice corporation, or combined with undergraduate or graduate studies. Typically, a practice program will run six to twelve months in length.
- ➔ *Pass a national examination* administered by the [Commission on Dietetic Registration \(CDR\)](#).
- ➔ *Complete continuing professional educational requirements* to maintain registration.

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Some RDs hold additional certifications in specialized areas of practice, such as pediatric or renal nutrition, nutrition support, and diabetes education. These certifications 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.

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, public health, education, research, 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, HMOs 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, 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 businesses and industries*, working in communications, consumer affairs, public relations, marketing, or product development.
- ➔ *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 to improve their quality of life through healthy eating habits.
- ➔ *Universities and medical centers*, teaching physicians, nurses, dietetics students, 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 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 would need to complete at that school to meet the academic 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 US who have been working full-time 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 US Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of dietitians is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through the year 2014 because of 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 patients' 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 those in need through 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 college or university you are interested in attending. Federal grants and low-interest loans may also be available.

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

FOR CAREER AND EDUCATION QUESTIONS CONTACT:

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