

Registered Dietitian (RD)

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 US regionally accredited university or college and course work accredited or approved by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.
- **Completed an ACEND-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 website at 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 the Academy, 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 COURSEWORK

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.

INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONALS

Individuals who completed their education and training outside of the US, or received credentials in another country, may be eligible to become credentialed RDs in the US. Individuals who have completed the education and credentialing requirements in one country may be eligible for another country's credentialing examination if the two countries have entered into a "reciprocity" agreement to allow this. If reciprocity does not apply, you must have your academic degree validated as equivalent to the bachelor's or master's degree conferred by a US regionally-accredited college or university **and** complete an ACEND-approved supervised practice requirement to establish your eligibility to sit for the exam. It is important to note that all individuals who establish registration eligibility — whether under the provisions of a reciprocity agreement or through the combination of a validated academic degree and supervised practice program — must successfully write the Registration Examination for Dietitians to earn the RD credential.

[More Information for International Students »](#)

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 ACEND. 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 an ACEND-accredited supervised practice program.

SALARIES AND JOB OUTLOOK

According to the Academy's 2009 Dietetics Compensation and Benefits survey, half of all RDs in the US who have been working in the field for five years or less earn \$51,100 to \$62,200 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 RDs, in management and business, earn incomes of \$85,000 to \$88,000.

According to the US 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 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 or approved 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 Foundation scholarship information.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

For other career guidance information, contact Academy's 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

*This information is directly quoted from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics website at <http://www.eatright.org/BecomeanRDorDTR/content.aspx?id=8142>