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## Dietitians

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### Summary

- Dietitians offer advice on eating to help people improve their health and general wellbeing.
  - When choosing a dietitian, make sure to check their qualifications – look for the APD credential.
  - If you have a specific health condition and have been referred to a dietitian by your doctor, the dietitian will work closely with your doctor to devise a suitable diet.
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Dietitians provide food and nutrition information, and support people to improve their health. They provide advice on nutrition-related matters and can modify diets to help manage conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, overweight and obesity, cancer, food allergies and intolerances.

There are no rules controlling the use of the terms 'dietitian' and 'nutritionist', which can be used by people with limited nutrition training. Always ask about the qualifications of a dietitian or nutritionist. When choosing a dietitian, make sure they have an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) credential.

### Dietitians are trained professionals

Dietitians are professionals with the qualifications and skills to provide expert nutrition and dietary advice. They translate the latest scientific information into practical advice about what to eat.

Dietitians have university qualifications gained from courses accredited by the Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA). They keep up to date with new training and education, and meet the Association's guidelines for evidence-based practice.

### Dietitians work in a range of fields

Dietitians work across many different fields, including:

- **Patient care** – dietitians in hospitals and nursing homes develop menus to meet patients' nutritional needs. This includes people recovering from illness or surgery, and those with health conditions like diabetes, heart disease, swallowing difficulties and poor appetite. Dietitians educate patients and family members on eating well, and work with them to make sure that diets meet individual needs.
- **Private practice and consultancy** – dietitians work with individuals, groups and organisations to provide dietary advice, and run health and nutrition education programs and seminars. They may also provide nutrition and health information to the media.
- **Community and public health** – dietitians work to improve eating habits, health and wellbeing at the local level (such as practicing out of community health centres) or at state or national levels, to influence food policy and improve access to better food choices for everyone.
- **Food industry** – dietitians work to improve the nutritional quality of foods, develop nutrition education campaigns, promote food safety, and work with food law and regulations.
- **Research and teaching** – dietitians investigate the links between food and health to improve their knowledge of how diet can promote good health and prevent disease. Dietitians also teach in universities.
- **Sports nutrition** – dietitians help athletes, sporting clubs, children and those interested in fitness to eat better to achieve their goals. Their advice may be related to helping people achieve peak sporting performance, or improve energy and activity levels.

### Accredited nutritionists

Accredited nutritionists are tertiary-qualified nutrition professionals who have expertise in a range of nutrition services. These may include areas such as community and public health nutrition, nutrition research and education related to nutrition, but they don't have qualifications in individual dietary counselling, group dietary therapy or

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medical nutrition therapy.

### **How to find a dietitian**

There are a number of ways to find a dietitian, including:

- Check the 'Find an Accredited Practising Dietitian' section of the DAA website.
- Telephone the APD hotline on 1800 812 942.
- Ask your doctor for a recommendation. Some community health centres have a dietitian on their staff.
- Browse the Better Health Channel services directory.

### **Schedule of fees for dietitians**

Consultations with dietitians who work in public hospitals are free of charge and community health centres may charge a small fee, depending on your situation. Privately practicing dietitians may charge anywhere from \$50 to more than \$150 for an initial consultation. Follow-up appointments are usually shorter and less expensive (around \$50, depending on the complexity of the case). Some dietitians offer concession prices.

Many private health funds offer rebates for these services, and some dietitian appointments are partially or fully covered under Medicare, however, you will need a doctors referral for these.

### **What to expect from a dietitian**

The initial consultation may run for around 45 minutes to an hour. The dietitian will ask detailed questions about your current diet, exercise habits, general health and lifestyle. These questions allow the dietitian to tailor an individual eating plan to your needs.

If you have a specific medical condition and have been referred to a dietitian by your doctor, the dietitian will work closely with your doctor, and may review blood and other test results to put together a suitable eating plan. You may be given written information to take home to help you achieve your healthy eating goals.

Follow-up appointments allow the dietitian to keep track of your progress, support you and fine-tune your eating plan. Your dietitian's main goal is to give you the knowledge and skills to be able to make the best food choices and take care of your health.

### **Where to get help**

- Dietitians Association of Australia Tel. 1800 812 942
- Your doctor
- Your local community health centre
- Sports Dietitians Australia Tel. (03) 9926 1336

### **Things to remember**

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**This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:**

Dietitians Association of Australia

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