Dietitians

Summary

- Dietitians offer advice on eating to help people improve their health and wellbeing.
- When choosing a dietitian, make sure they are an accredited practising dietitian (APD).
- If you have a health condition your doctor may refer you to a dietitian. The dietitian will work closely with you and your doctor to develop a suitable diet for you.

Dietitians provide food and nutrition information, and support people to improve their health. They provide advice on nutrition-related matters. Dietitians can also change 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’. This means they can be used by people with limited nutrition training, as well as fully trained health professionals. Always ask about the qualifications of a dietitian or nutritionist. When choosing a dietitian, make sure they are an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD).

Dietitians are trained professionals

Dietitians are qualified professionals with the 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 DAA’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 educate patients and family members on eating well. They work with them to make sure that diets meet individual needs. They develop menus to meet patients’ nutritional needs. For example, they adapt menus for people recovering from illness or surgery, or with health conditions like:
  - diabetes
  - heart disease
  - swallowing difficulties
  - poor appetite

- **private practice and consultancy** – dietitians work with individuals, groups and organisations to provide dietary advice. They 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 in the community. (They often work in community health centres). They also work at state or national levels to influence food policy and improve access to better food choices for everyone

- **food industry** – in the food industry, dietitians work to:
  - improve the nutritional quality of foods

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- develop nutrition education campaigns
- promote food safety
- work with food law and regulations.

- **research and teaching** – dietitians investigate the links between food and health. They do this to learn how diet can promote good health and prevent disease. Dietitians also teach in universities

- **sports nutrition** – dietitians help athletes, sporting clubs, children and people interested in fitness to eat better. They do this to help them achieve their sporting and fitness goals. For example, they may give advice on how to achieve peak sporting performance, or improve energy and activity levels.

**Accredited nutritionists**

Accredited nutritionists are university-qualified nutrition professionals. They have expertise in a range of nutrition services, which may include:

- community and public health nutrition
- nutrition research
- education related to nutrition.

Accredited nutritionists do not have qualifications in:

- individual dietary counselling
- group dietary therapy, or
- medical nutrition therapy.

**How to find a dietitian**

You can find a dietitian by:

- checking the ‘Find an Accredited Practising Dietitian’ section of the [DAA website](http://www.dietitians.org.au)
- calling the DAA on **1800 812 942**
- asking your doctor for a recommendation (some community health centres have a dietitian on their staff)
- browsing the Better Health Channel services directory.

**Schedule of fees for dietitians**

Consultations with dietitians who work in public hospitals are free of charge. Community health centres may charge a small fee for a consultation with a dietitian, depending on your situation.

Privately practising dietitians may charge anywhere from $50 to more than $150 for an initial consultation. Follow-up appointments are usually shorter and less expensive. Some dietitians offer concession prices.

Many private health funds offer rebates for these services. Some dietitian appointments are partially or fully covered under Medicare. (Note that you will need a doctor’s 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 medical condition and have been referred to a dietitian by your doctor, the dietitian will work closely with your doctor. They may review blood and other test results to put together a suitable eating plan for you. 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**
