

There is lots of different dietary and nutritional advice out there. However, dietitians are the only qualified health professionals that assess, diagnose and treat diet and nutrition problems. This sheet will help you understand what a dietitian is, what they do, who can see one, how to contact one and the qualifications needed to become one.

What is a dietitian?

A dietitian is a degree-qualified health professional who:

- helps to promote nutritional well-being, treat disease and prevent nutrition-related problems
- provides practical, safe advice, based on current scientific evidence
- holds a graduate qualification in nutrition and dietetics in the UK.

Only dietitians registered with the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) can use the legally protected title 'dietitian' and .

Dietitians are the only nutrition professionals to be regulated by law and governed by an ethical code, to ensure that they always work to the highest standard.

What do dietitians do?

- translate nutrition science into understandable, practical information about food, allowing people to make appropriate lifestyle and food choices
- treat a range of medical conditions with dietary therapy, specially tailored to each individual.
- advise on healthy eating for all ages, races, cultures and social groups.
- conduct research relating to health, diet and nutrition.



- Write and provide comment for the media.
- advise industry and government.
- give talks and lectures to health professionals and the public.
- teach in higher education.

Who can see a dietitian?

You can see a dietitian if you have been diagnosed with a medical condition or have concerns with any of the areas below:

- diabetes
- food allergy and intolerance
- gastroenterology (digestive system)
- heart and Thoracic (chest)
- HIV/AIDS
- mental Health
- obesity
- oncology (cancer)
- renal (kidneys)

What areas do dietitians work in?

- hospitals
- the community
- public health and social care
- research
- public relations and media
- health related agencies
- food and pharmaceutical industries
- education
- sport and leisure

- private health care
- management
- freelance

How can you access a dietitian?

Most people will be able to see a dietitian within the NHS after being referred by an NHS GP, other doctor, health visitor or health professional. You can also self-refer – contact your local hospital nutrition and dietetics team to see if this is something they offer. Consultations with dietitians within the NHS are free.

Alternatively if you wish to see a dietitian who practices privately or 'freelance', you can search online for a dietitian near you at the Freelance Dietitians website www.freelancedietitians.org/ which is run by the BDA's Freelance Dietitian Group.

How can I train to be a dietitian?

To qualify as a dietitian you would need to complete either an undergraduate or postgraduate (as applicable) pre-registration courses at university.

All courses include periods of practical training in hospital and community settings, normally local to the university you are studying at.

The entry requirements for undergraduate degree courses vary, but you will normally be expected to have obtained A level passes (or Scottish/Irish equivalent) in at least two science subjects (Biology and Chemistry). Access courses in science and BTEC science qualifications may also be acceptable.

You should have Mathematics and English to GCSE Grade C or above (or Scottish/Irish equivalent) standard.

A good command of spoken and written English is essential. You will also need to undergo an enhanced Disclosure and Barring (DBS) (formerly CRB) check and occupational health screening. Remember that each application is considered on its own merit. Postgraduate qualifications can be taken at several universities. Normally, applicants for these courses will have successfully completed an honours degree course which contains an acceptable level of Human Physiology and Biochemistry.

For a list of universities offering all dietetic courses visit www.bda.uk.com/careers/courses or UCAS at: www.ucas.ac.uk

The British Dietetic Association (BDA)

The BDA, founded in 1936, is the professional association and trade union for dietitians in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

It is the nation's largest organisation of food and nutrition professionals with over 8,500 members.

Although the BDA is for dietitians, our website www.bda.uk.com does provide some information for the general public, including access to relevant publications, including other Food Fact Sheets on diet and health.

Also have a look at our consumer websites: www.bdaweightwise.com and www.teenweightwise.com

which offer responsible and reliable information based on scientific evidence along with practical advice on weight management, tools to motivate you and achieve success and independent reviews of popular diets.

This Food Factsheet is a public service of The British Dietetic Association (BDA) intended for information only. It is not a substitute for proper medical diagnosis or dietary advice given by a dietitian. If you need to see a dietitian, visit your GP for a referral or: www.freelancedietitians.org for a private dietitian.

To check your dietitian is registered check www.hcpc-uk.org This Food Fact Sheet and others are available to download free of charge at www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts

The information sources used to develop this fact sheet are available at www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts