



The Association  
of UK Dietitians

# Want a career as a dietitian?



## What is a dietitian?

Registered dietitians are the only qualified health professionals that assess, diagnose and treat diet and nutrition problems at an individual and wider public health level. Uniquely, dietitians use the most up to date public health and scientific research on food, health and disease, which they translate into practical guidance to enable people to make appropriate lifestyle and food choices. Dietitians are the only nutrition professionals to be statutorily regulated, and governed by an ethical code, to ensure that they always work to the highest standard. Dietitians work in the NHS, private practice, industry, education, research, sport, media, public relations, publishing, Non Government Organisations and government. Their advice influences food and health policy across the spectrum from government, local communities and individuals.

## What does a dietitian actually do?

The role of a dietitian is extremely varied and exciting. In general, dietitians work as part of a team, caring for people in hospital or in the community. They also work to promote good health and prevent disease by informing and teaching the public, health professionals and others about diet and nutrition. Dietitians help to promote healthy food choices and prevent disease by increasing awareness of the link between nutrition and health. However, many other career opportunities are available to dietitians, which make it such an exciting profession to join. Many dietitians work in the food industry, public health, education, sports nutrition, research or the media and a growing number decide to work in a freelance capacity.

## Hospitals

After qualifying, many dietitians go on to do clinical work in the National Health Service where they advise those who need a modified or special diet, such as people with a food allergy or diabetes. They work in hospital wards, ranging from general medical wards to intensive care, and in out-patient clinics. They may then specialise in one particular area, such as paediatrics (children) or renal (kidney) dietetics. They also train, support and advise other health professionals, dietetic support workers and students in the hospital.

*“As a hospital dietitian I work with people who have a wide range of medical problems and liaise closely with a variety of other health professionals every day. The work is challenging and interesting and the diversity of people you meet ensures every day is different!”*

### *Hospital Dietitian*



## Community

Community dietitians are involved in health promotion, public health, clinical work, or a mixture of both. They help to promote healthy food choices and prevent disease by increasing awareness of the link between nutrition and health. They work, for example, with:

- individuals on a one-to-one basis
- health professionals, e.g. GPs, practice nurses, health visitors, midwives
- schools and youth services
- elderly and residential care
- public health teams, local authorities and social services

*“As a community dietitian my job involves providing training to health professionals, e.g. health visitors, nursery nurses, working on school based healthier eating projects or giving nutritional advice on school meals. I also train health care workers in residential or care homes, work one to one delivering dietary advice to clients in GP surgeries or working with weight management groups in health centres. Another aspect of my role is developing food and health policies in public health departments or for local authorities.”*

### Community Dietitian

## Sports Nutrition

Sports dietitians provide expert advice on all areas of nutrition for sport. Their job is to help athletes understand that what, when and how much they eat and drink can have an effect on their performance. Sports dietitians:

- work with squads, teams and coaches
- work with local fitness centres
- provide advice to those catering for sports people
- give advice on nutritional supplements

*“I work with a wide range of athletes from different sports in my role with the British Olympic Association, and depending on the demands of their sport they all have different nutritional requirements. But whatever the sport, giving really practical advice to athletes about food and fluid choices as well as explaining the science is a key element to success. Helping them achieve their sporting goals through good nutritional practices is an exciting and rewarding career.”*

### Sports Dietitian



## The Food and Pharmaceutical Industry

There is a wealth of opportunities for dietitians to work with industry. Many work directly for a food manufacturer, food retailer, or a pharmaceutical company or may work with a public relations company representing an industry client. Dietitians are there to give unbiased advice on nutrition, produce nutritional literature, respond to customer concerns and set nutritional standards for the companies.

*“As a dietitian working in the foodservice sector, which covers the food chain from grower or manufacturer through a distributor to caterers for service to the consumer, I have an important role in the development and setting of standards for products. I influence not only some of the best and most exotic meals served but also the ordinary, which now account for over 30% of the food people eat outside the home.”*

### ***Dietitian for a Food Manufacturer***

## Freelance

Many dietitians choose to be self-employed and seek opportunities to work in a wide range of areas:

- with the media
- advising the food and pharmaceutical industry
- in private practice
- in publishing, such as consumer magazines and books

*“No two days are the same. I may be delivering a presentation to nurses one day, writing tips and recipes for the website the next, followed by a live chat on the radio from my home telephone in the evening.”*

### ***Freelance Dietitian***

## Research

Dietitians deliver the best quality practice and to do this they use the evidence that is available from research. Many dietitians conduct research which helps to build this evidence base. Most do it as part of their daily practice and some are predominately engaged in research. They work in many areas including higher education, research institutes, hospitals and medical schools and industrial environments.



Research is exciting and the field of nutrition and dietetics provides many opportunities to be involved in research. Increasing numbers of dietitians are studying for research degrees.

*“Nutrition is a massive topic and the research opportunities are extremely varied and interesting. Doing research is exciting and rewarding; there is always a new challenge around the corner.”*

## **Research Dietitian**

### **Education**

There are a number of ways in which dietitians work to educate others. A key role is to work as lecturers in higher education, helping to train student dietitians. They also work to train other health care workers such as nurses, GPs and public health nutritionists to help the general public make informed choices about the food they eat.

*“My role as a university lecturer has three overlapping strands: teaching, research and ‘scholarly activity’. The courses on which I teach include Human Nutrition and Dietetics, Sport Science and Health Promotion. My current research includes collaborations with dietitians in hospitals, which is a great way to link academic research work with meaningful practice. It’s a challenging combination.”*

## **Lecturer in Dietetics**

### **The Media**

With the growing public interest in diet and health, many dietitians work with the media to ensure consistent and accurate messages are conveyed. Ranging from writing articles for local and national newspapers and magazines to appearing on popular television or radio programmes, there are many opportunities to work in this exciting field.

*“As a dietitian working in PR, I find it challenging, rewarding and varied. Working with the media enables me to get across scientifically sound nutrition information to the public and to correct any misinformation.”*

## **BDA National PR Officer**



## How do I qualify as a dietitian?

Training usually consists of a recognised university-based course leading to a BSc Honours degree in Dietetics, or Nutrition and Dietetics. After successful completion of the degree you would then be eligible for registration with the Health Professions Council, which is essential to work as a dietitian in the NHS. If you already hold an honours degree in a life science subject, you may be able to do a two-year postgraduate course in dietetics.

## What will my training consist of?

Your training will be a mixture of theory - including subjects such as biochemistry, psychology, nutrition physiology, communication skills - and practical work. There is a period of practice-based learning in hospital and community settings, where you will be given the chance to put your learning into practice. This 28-week practical training programme is spread throughout your four or two years of study and usually consists of an initial four-week placement early on in the course followed by two 12-week placements later on.

## How do I get onto a course?

To start a degree course you will normally be expected to have 'A' level passes in two or three subjects, preferably a science related subject such as chemistry, mathematics or biology. You will also need mathematics and English at GCSE grade C. The equivalent Scottish and Irish qualifications are also accepted. Good written and verbal communication skills are also essential.

To get onto a postgraduate course you will normally be expected to hold an honours degree course which contains an acceptable level of human physiology and biochemistry. A good command of spoken and written English is essential.

There would be a need to ensure that you can meet the demands of the dietetic programme. If you have any queries, contact the admissions tutor at the university to which you are applying.



## What other skills do I need to be a dietitian?

Your in-depth training will ensure you have all the necessary knowledge and clinical skills to practise as a dietitian. However personal qualities such as good communication skills, an interest in people and food, tact and understanding, as well as the ability to work as part of a team, are all essential qualities of a dietitian.

## Where to Study

For a list of universities that offer dietetic courses visit [www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com) and click on 'Train to be a Dietitian/ How to Qualify and Where to Study'.



## The British Dietetic Association

The British Dietetic Association (BDA) was formed in 1936. It is the professional association representing Dietitians in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. To be a member you must hold a recognised dietetic qualification. The Association negotiates, on behalf of its members, salaries and conditions within the National Health Service. Members of the Association serve on the Health Professions Council, the body granting statutory registration to qualified Dietitians, which is compulsory for employment in the National Health Service.

The role of the BDA is to inform, protect, represent and support its members. For more information log on to our website [www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com)

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