



What is a Dietitian?

Choosing the right person to seek help and advice from can sometimes be a confusing task. Many people claim to be experts in nutrition yet have very limited knowledge and offer no protection to the public.

This leaflet gives an overview of the differences between the roles and functions of dietitians, nutritionists and nutritional therapists.

- Dietitians are the only qualified health professionals that assess, diagnose and treat dietary and nutritional problems at an individual and wider public health level. They work with both healthy and sick people. 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 regulated by law, and are governed by an ethical code to ensure that they always work to the highest standards.
- Dietitians interpret the science of nutrition to improve health and treat diseases and conditions by educating and giving practical advice to clients, patients, carers and colleagues. They advise and help to maintain nutritional status (ensure adequate nutrition intake) when individuals want to trial dietary interventions, such as exclusion diets, nutritional supplementation or dietary interventions in areas such as autism, for which evidence is still emerging.

They use recognised methodologies to critically appraise the evidence base which includes all forms of evidence and research to inform their advice. Dietitians cannot offer advice where there would be personal financial benefit.

- Dietitians are legally able to supply and administer some 'prescription-only' medicine e.g. insulin phosphate binders and pancreatic enzymes, through trusts/health boards. They can also adjust this medication. Much of their work is spent advising/counselling other medical staff as to the best course of action in regards to an individual's nutritional status.

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The difference between a Dietitian, Nutritionist and a Nutritional Therapist

Question	Dietitian	Nutritionist	Nutritional Therapist
Is the title protected by law?	✓ Yes.	✗ No. Anyone can call themselves a nutritionist. However, only nutritionists who are registered with the UK Voluntary Register of Nutritionists (UKVRN) can call themselves a Registered Nutritionist.	✗ No.
Is there a minimum qualification they must have before they practice?	✓ Yes. At least a BSc Hons in Dietetics or a related science degree with a postgrad diploma or higher degree in Dietetics.	✗ No.	✗ No.
Are they regulated by law?	✓ Yes. As health professionals, ALL dietitians are regulated by the Health Care Professions Council. There is no option to opt out of being regulated.	✗ No. However, the Association for Nutrition runs the voluntary (UKVRN) to regulate Registered Nutritionists.	✗ No.
Where do they work?	Dietitians work with healthy and sick people in a variety of settings. They work in the NHS and in private clinics, freelance, the food industry, workplace, catering, education, sport and the media, to name but a few. Dietitians are the only qualified health professionals that assess, diagnose and treat diet and nutrition problems at an individual and wider public health level.	Nutritionists work in non-clinical settings such as research, teaching, sport, food industry, the exercise industry, government department and freelance. Some nutritionists are employed in the NHS working alongside dietitians. Nutritionists do not independently work with people with known existing medical conditions, to prevent disease.	Nutritional Therapists see paying individuals on a private basis who wish to consider alternative therapies.

This leaflet is a summary of a larger document which can be found at www.bda.uk.com/publications

To find out more about the Trust a Dietitian campaign please visit www.trustadietitian.co.uk

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