

## What is the difference between a Dietitian, nutritionist or nutritional therapist and how to find a Dietitian or regulated nutrition expert

Whilst the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute (INDI) recognises the choice of the consumer and patients to use complementary or alternative therapies, a key role of the INDI is to ensure that the public are protected from unregulated or inappropriate advice on nutrition. This leaflet informs the public on how to select or check the credentials of any nutrition advisors or practitioners, and to provide information on how to find a qualified Dietitian. The key differences between the roles and functions of Dietitians, nutritionists and nutritional therapists are outlined.

Many people claim to be experts in nutrition yet have very limited knowledge and do not offer protection to the public. Choosing the right person from whom to seek help and advice can sometimes be a confusing task. This is not helped by an increasing number of self-proclaimed or alternative 'nutrition practitioners' emerging from informal courses. Such courses are not recognised by the State or by Irish Universities.

Unfortunately, for those who use the services of these unqualified 'nutrition practitioners', the advice or therapy provided may be ineffective, inappropriate and potentially unsafe.

### What is a Dietitian?

A Dietitian is a health professional who has a Bachelor's degree specialising in foods and nutrition, as well as a period of practical training in a hospital and a community setting. It takes at least four years of full-time study at a university to qualify as a Dietitian. Many Dietitians further their knowledge by pursuing a master's or Doctoral degree. Dietitians apply the science of nutrition to promote health, treat and prevent malnutrition and provide therapeutic dietary guidelines for patients, clients and the public in health and illness.

The title "Registered Dietitian" and "Dietitian" ~~are now will be~~ protected by law so that only qualified practitioners who have met the required education qualifications and continue to maintain their knowledge and skills through continuing professional development, can use that title. CORU is responsible for regulation of health and social care professions under the Health and Social Care Professional's Act, 2005, in Ireland. Dietitians have public protection as their mandate. Dietitians are held accountable for their conduct and the care they provide both through the regulation process and also through membership of the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute (INDI). All members of The INDI are bound to comply with the code of ethics and professional practice

The term Nutritionist is not protected by law so people with different levels of training and knowledge can call themselves a "Nutritionist"; in fact anyone can call themselves a nutritionist!:-

Title	Qualifications
Dietitian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• BSc. (Hons) Human Nutrition and Dietetics or a related science degree with a postgraduate diploma or master's degree in Dietetics. 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 standard.</li><li>• Dietitians are qualified to work with healthy and sick people in a broad range of settings including hospitals, primary care and private practice.</li></ul>

	<p>Dietitians also work in education, research, industry, government and consultancy. <i>Dietitians are the only nutrition professionals that can be employed by the HSE.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dietitians do not sell any nutrition supplements in relation to their nutritional advice in the clinical setting.</li> </ul>
<b>Nutritionist or Public Health Nutritionist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BSc (Hons) or MSc in Public Health Nutrition, Human Nutrition or Nutritional science.</li> <li>• Nutritionists or Public Health Nutritionists are qualified to provide information about food and healthy eating and often work in roles including public health, health improvement, health policy, local and national government as well as in education and research.</li> <li>• As this profession is not regulated by law, anybody can call themselves a nutritionist. However, those who hold the appropriate qualifications can register with the UK Voluntary Register of Nutritionists (UKVRN). This, is a UK register, there is no register of Nutritionists in Ireland. Nutritionists are not required to be registered in order to work in Ireland.</li> <li>• In many cases Dietitians have a dual qualification which qualifies them to practice as Dietitians and Nutritionists.</li> </ul>
<b>Nutritional Therapists</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are all sorts of courses of differing lengths which claim to train nutritional therapists. Nutritional therapists are not eligible to register with the UK Voluntary Register of Nutritionists and <del>are will not</del> be eligible to register with CORU, the multi-profession health regulator in Ireland.</li> <li>• Nutritional therapists provide nutritional advice in private clinic settings. Some may offer nutritional tests such as food intolerance testing or hair analysis which are <b>not evidence based</b> within conventional medicine. Some may also offer treatments such as supplements, detox diets, and food exclusions for which there is little robust scientific evidence.</li> <li>• Products or supplements may be offered as part of the consultation process.</li> </ul>

### How to find a Dietitian or regulated Nutrition Expert

Outside of the state regulation of Dietitians, nutrition advice is largely a self-regulated industry where anyone can set up and practice without a recognised or regulated qualification, meaning there is no real protection for consumers or patients.

When looking for nutritional advice in relation to your health, it is advisable to ask the practitioner about their background and qualifications to ensure they are appropriately qualified and regulated. You can find a qualified Dietitian by:

- contacting your local hospital, GP surgery or Primary Care Centre
- searching under the **Find A Dietitian** section on [www.indi.ie](http://www.indi.ie)
- [Find a freelance dietitian on www.sedi.ie](http://www.sedi.ie)
- [Check if your nutrition expert is state-registered on www.coru.ie](http://www.coru.ie)

The INDI is the professional organisation that represents over 600 Dietitians across Ireland. INDI sets national standards for undergraduate dietetic programs, dietetic placements, and graduate degree practicum programs. [www.indi.ie](http://www.indi.ie). For more information on the regulation of health care professionals in Ireland see [www.coru.ie](http://www.coru.ie).

