

Dietitian vs nutritionist: What's the difference?

Dietitian and nutritionist: both of these professions work around diet and food, but are they the same? While they overlap in some ways, these jobs are actually quite different. So what exactly is the difference between a dietitian and a nutritionist?

The short answer is that a dietitian works in a regulated field, and must have completed a bachelor's degree. Nutritionists do not need qualifications and are not regulated, making this career pathway more accessible, but with a narrower field of expertise.

This guide will help you learn the key differences between the two professions and which may be the right fit for you.

What is a dietitian?

A [dietitian](#) is a qualified professional who specialises in the science of nutrition and dietetics. Qualified dietitians work with people to assess their nutritional needs, develop meal plans and provide advice on improving health and managing disease through diet and nutrition. They provide personalised advice based on their client's age, medical conditions, fitness level and dietary preferences.

As a dietitian you are qualified to prescribe diets and nutritional aids, such as IV feeding devices. You can also help monitor the diets and nutrition of clients with specific diseases including:

- diabetes,
- cardiovascular disease,
- food allergies,
- renal disease,
- gastrointestinal disease, and
- obesity.

This may involve meeting with patients to regulate their eating schedules, working at

residential [aged-care facilities](#) and ordering blood tests to determine deficiencies.

What is a nutritionist?

A [nutritionist](#) provides advice on diet and how it can impact health. They aren't qualified to prescribe medical advice or nutritional therapy to manage disease. They can provide guidance on how food can help boost energy, build muscle or prevent medical conditions like high cholesterol or obesity. While they are not considered medical professionals, nutritionists can provide diet and lifestyle coaching that can improve people's medical conditions.

Nutritionists are not regulated in Australia and there's no minimum qualification to become one. However, a diploma or degree in human nutrition is a standard expectation for people wanting to become nutritionists.

The difference between a dietitian and nutritionist

Though they sometimes have similar responsibilities, the roles of dietitian and nutritionist are distinct. The differences between the two may influence your opinion on [which may be right for you](#). Here we break them down, to give you a better idea.

Qualifications and education

One of the key differences between a dietitian versus nutritionist is the level of education required for each.

Dietitian qualifications

To become a dietitian, you need to complete a bachelor's in dietetics. If you've already completed an undergraduate degree, you can complete a Masters Degree in Dietetics. Most dietitians also become accredited by Dietitians Australia, the peak body for dietetic professionals in the country.

Nutritionist qualifications

You don't need a qualification to become a nutritionist, but it may be difficult to get a job as a nutritionist without a certificate, diploma or degree. There are many [courses in nutrition](#) to choose from, including bachelor's degrees in nutrition science and graduate

diplomas in human nutrition. Many nutritionists also complete a Certificate IV in Allied Health Assistance (Nutrition & Dietetics).

Regulation and licensing

Dietitian is a regulated profession in Australia, while nutritionist is not. To become an accredited dietitian, you must:

- be degree qualified,
- become a member of Dietitians Australia,
- join the Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) program,
- complete a provisional year, including formal mentoring from a Full Accredited Practising Dietitian,
- demonstrate 30 hours of continuing professional development (CPD) each year, and
- maintain recency of practice hours.

A dietitian can then provide medical advice, prescription and treatments, while nutritionists aren't qualified to offer these services.

Salary and benefits

Despite the differences in qualifications between a dietitian versus nutritionist, the salaries are quite similar. Both [nutritionists](#) and [dietitians](#) earn an average of \$75,000 to \$95,000 a year – however, salaries can differ greatly depending on location and experience. While there is a higher demand for qualified dietitians, nutritionists tend to have higher job satisfaction.

Career opportunities for dietitians and nutritionists

Becoming a dietitian or nutritionist can open up many different career paths. You can work in a vast range of industries for a wide variety of organisations – or even for yourself. If you're still not sure about whether to become a dietitian versus a nutritionist, the following may help you decide.

Career opportunities for dietitians

As a dietitian, you could enjoy a career as a:

- **Registered dietitian or registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN):** a

registered dietitian or dietitian nutritionist is someone who works in the general area of dietetics, prescribing diets, supplementation and nutritional aids to support healthy lifestyles and disease management.

- **Clinical dietetics:** a clinical dietitian works as part of a healthcare team in a hospital or residential care centre. They assess the nutritional needs of patients or residents.
- **Food-service dietetics:** a food-service dietitian works with clinical and catering staff to improve the nutritional value of food and drinks provided to patients or clients, such as in hospitals and schools.
- **Public health dietitian:** public health dietitians help educate groups or individuals on optimal nutritional habits and its impacts on health.
- **Sports/exercise dietitian:** as a sports/exercise dietitian, your role is to help athletes develop strategies to maximise health and performance through diet.
- **Private practice dietitian:** a private practice dietitian works in a dietitian-to-patient environment. They help people find their ideal nutritional and dietary needs for their health and wellbeing.
- **Mental health dietitian:** mental health dietitians work with mental health practitioners. They provide nutritional education and training to influence behavioural change. They may also provide education and training to other health care professionals to help them with their patients.
- **Research dietitian:** research dietitians take part in the development of medical research studies and the relevance of diet and nutrition to health.

You may also choose to go into academia, teaching, training or management.

Career opportunities for nutritionists

Through your career as a nutritionist, you could pursue a career as a:

- **Licensed nutritionist:** a licensed nutritionist has the relevant qualifications to provide dietary guidance to clients.
- **Nutrition assistant:** provides assistance to dietitians in hospital settings, handling duties like kitchen prep, cooking food, recording patient meal orders, etc.
- **Health coach:** health coaches support clients in adopting a healthy lifestyle for greater wellbeing.
- **Food technologists:** research and develop foods for better nutrition. A bachelor's degree in nutrition, food science or similar may be required.
- **Recipe developer:** create original recipes and meals with optimised nutrition or for special dietary requirements (plant-based, low sodium, gluten-free, etc).

Knowing the difference between dietitians and nutritionists will help you [create the right career plan](#) for you. Becoming a dietitian generally requires more study and accreditation, while becoming a nutritionist is a more accessible pathway. Both are rewarding and challenging careers that help improve people's lives through enhanced well-being.

FAQs

How to choose between a dietitian and nutritionist career?

Choosing whether to become a dietitian or a nutritionist depends on your study preferences and how specialised you wish to be. Nutritionists are not regulated and you may only need a diploma in nutrition to gain employment, while dietitians are heavily regulated and will need at least bachelor's degree in nutrition and dietetics.

Are nutritionists more qualified than dietitians?

No, dietitians are generally more qualified than nutritionists as dietetics is a regulated field. To become nationally accredited, dietiticians must join the Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) program and become a member of Dietitians Australia.

Which is better: dietitian or nutritionist?

Whether dietitian or nutritionist is a better profession for you better depends on your personal preferences. It's important to note that all dietitians are nutritionists, but not all nutritionists are dietitians. Generally speaking, a dietitian can advise on all aspects of diet and nutrition, while a nutritionist helps with more basic nutritional advice and diet and lifestyle coaching.

Do dietitians give meal plans?

A dietitian can provide a meal plan, which will form part of a full program tailored to a patient's health needs. Like a doctor prescribes medication, a dietitian can prescribe a diet to help patients with their health and wellbeing.

What is a nutritionist doctor called?

Neither nutritionists nor dietitians have the same qualifications as doctors/physicians. Dietitians are accredited and qualified to prescribe medical nutrition advice, and they are considered experts in medical nutrition, but they are not called doctors.