

Dietitian

The person hospitals call when food becomes medicine. A master's degree is now the entry ticket.

TYPICAL PAY

\$76,400

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$49k to \$104k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

5 to 7 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, schools, public health programs

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Biology, chemistry and math. Anything that gets you comfortable with science.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
In dietetics, nutrition or food science, at a program accredited by ACEND (the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics).
- 3 Graduate degree** 1 to 2 years
Since 2024 the Commission on Dietetic Registration requires a master's degree before you may sit the registration exam. Many schools now run a combined program.
- 4 Supervised practice** 6 to 12 months
At least 1,000 hours in hospitals, clinics and food service under a registered dietitian. Places are limited and not everyone gets one first time.
- 5 Exam and state license** A few months
Pass the national registration examination, then apply to your state board where a license is required.

Pros and cons

- + Weekday hours and almost no night shifts, rare in health care
- + A licensed, protected role rather than a job anyone can claim
- + Clear specialties to move into, each with a pay bump
- Long and now more expensive: a master's degree is required
- Supervised practice is competitive and often unpaid
- Starting pay is low for the years of study involved

Good to know

Nutritionist is barely a protected word

In a number of states anyone can call themselves a nutritionist with no training at all. Registered dietitian nutritionist is the credential that is actually defended, which is why job listings ask for it by name.

The entry bar moved in 2024

The Commission on Dietetic Registration raised the minimum to a graduate degree for anyone sitting the registration exam from 2024 onward. People who qualified before that date kept their credential u...

Optional boosts

Renal nutrition. Oncology nutrition. Pediatric and neonatal nutrition. Diabetes care and education.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Dietitians and Nutritionists (29-1031.00)
Commission on Dietetic Registration
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
North Carolina Board of Dietetics and Nutrition

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/dietitian>



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