

Differences between dietitians and nutritionists

Dietitians

What they do

Dietitians assess, diagnose and treat dietary and nutritional problems. They work with both healthy and sick people, providing medical nutrition therapy for short-term and long-term medical conditions.

Most dietitians can prescribe “special foods” and approved nutrition-related medicines.

Medical insurance may pay for private dietitian visits.

Where they work

Dietitians mostly work in places like hospitals and clinics. In these settings, they provide medical nutrition therapy in the public health system and private practice.

They may also work in the food industry and food service management. Sports and exercise nutrition, teaching, research and the media. Also, government and non-government organisations. For example, the Heart Foundation and Diabetes New Zealand.

Regulation

In New Zealand, dietitians are the only regulated nutrition health profession. Only registered practitioners can use the title of dietitian or practise dietetics.

To keep their registration, dietitians must re-register annually. They must also take part in an audited continuing competency programme. The programme has continuing education, peer review and cultural competency requirements. The New Zealand Dietitians Board sets the requirements.

Qualifications

Registered dietitians must have a three-year accredited undergraduate health science degree. They must also have a two-year accredited Master of Dietetics degree or comparable training. The New Zealand Dietitians Board must endorse the training.

Dietetic training includes medical nutrition, public health and food service management. Dietetic tutors supervise clinical placements in hospital, community, public health and food service settings.

Nutritionists

Nutritionists provide information and advice about food, diet and health. They usually work with people who are well.

Registered nutritionists work within a specific field of expertise, depending on their qualifications. This can be human, plant or animal.

Nutritionists mostly work in non-clinical settings. These include the food industry, sports and exercise nutrition, teaching and research. Also, government and non-government organisations.

Some nutritionists work in public health units or freelance as consultants. For example, within the media.

Anyone can call themselves a nutritionist regardless of qualifications and experience. Nutritionists can register voluntarily with the New Zealand Nutrition Society. To do this, they need to meet education and experience requirements.

To keep their registration, nutritionists must re-register every three years. They must also provide evidence of continuing competency.

Anyone, with or without a nutrition qualification, may call themselves a nutritionist. Registered nutritionists must meet education and experience requirements.

Registered nutritionists are registered in a specific field of expertise. These include public health, education, practice, scientific research and industrial research.

There are two categories of professional accreditation. These are Registered Nutritionist and Associate Registered Nutritionist.

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