

Working in Nutrition FAQs

People working in the field of nutrition are typically registered nutritionists or dietitians. The information provided on the next few pages is designed to give you more information about these two exciting professions! This article covers:

- The difference between nutrition and dietetics
- The types of work you can do in each profession
- The qualifications required
- Deciding which course to choose
- Distance learning and vocational courses
- Work experience and internships

What's the difference between nutrition and dietetics?

Nutritionist

- Nutrition is the study of nutrients in food, how the body uses nutrients, and the relationship between diet, health and disease.
- Nutritionists create and apply scientific knowledge to promote an understanding of the effects of diet on health and wellbeing of humans and provide information about food, diet and healthy eating.
- They are not qualified to provide information about special diets for medical conditions and cannot work with hospitalised patients without supervision from a dietitian.
- The professional association for registered nutritionists is the Association for Nutrition <http://associationfornutrition.org/>.

Dietitian

- Dietetics is the application of the science of nutrition to the construction of diets and the selection and preparation of foods, in health and disease.
- A dietitian will have undertaken training in a hospital and/or community setting as part of his/her course and is specially trained to give practical advice to individuals about their diets to enable them to make healthy diet and lifestyle choices, or in clinical specialities and in patients with complex medical disorders and needs e.g. oncology, renal disease and malabsorption.
- 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.
- The professional association for registered dietitians in the UK is the British Dietetic Association <https://www.bda.uk.com/>.

A closer look at Nutritionists

What type of work can I do in nutrition?

Nutritionists can work in a number of different settings, including research, the food industry, Government, non-government organisations, public health, education, media and communications, and in sports and exercise. There are also a variety of food-orientated careers within the related field of food science and technology. Most of the major food manufacturers and retailers employ nutritionists and food scientists, and opportunities also exist abroad. For example, nutritionists can work in emergency relief or development projects in low income countries. Information on opportunities abroad and advice on training courses, including the personal skills and qualities required can be found at <http://www.redr.org.uk/>.

What qualifications do I need to become a nutritionist?

You will need to have undertaken a degree course in Nutrition (or a closely related bioscience) in order to become a nutritionist. Most careers will require at least an undergraduate degree (BSc) in a nutritional science or related subject, and some may require postgraduate study too. Some nutrition courses which meet a strict set of standards of professional education in nutrition are accredited with the Association for Nutrition (AfN). Graduates of these courses are eligible for direct entry onto the UK Voluntary Register of Nutritionists (UKVRN). In order to become a registered nutritionist in the UK you will need to have completed an undergraduate or postgraduate course that is accredited by AfN.

Who are the Association for Nutrition?

The [Association for Nutrition](#) (AfN) is the professional body for qualified nutritionists. The AfN maintains the UK Voluntary Register of Nutritionists (UKVRN), a competency-based register of individuals who are qualified and competent in nutritional science and practice. The term 'nutritionist' is not a protected title, however only those registered with the UKVRN can call themselves a Registered Nutritionist. A Registered Nutritionist will have specialist competencies in nutrition or public health nutrition, will usually have graduated from an AfN accredited degree course and have at least three years assessed postgraduate experience.

Registered Nutritionists follow the Code of Ethics and Statement of Professional Conduct and keep up to date through Continuing Professional Development (CPD). A vocational qualification alone is not enough to join the [UKVRN](#) because you will not have enough underpinning scientific knowledge to meet AfN's competencies. However, it is a good starting point and can help you progress towards undertaking higher level study such as a BSc. For information on how to register as a Nutritionist, visit the [Association for Nutrition](#) website.

What course should I take?

A list of all accredited nutrition courses can be found on the [Association for Nutrition](#) (AfN) website. Most nutrition courses will require A-levels in at least one science subject (usually biology), but often look for a second (normally Chemistry). However, some universities may offer a foundation year for students who wish to complete the degree but do not have any science-based A-levels. Some university courses may offer a professional work placement as part of the course, which enable students to gain some first-hand experience in nutrition.

My course is not accredited with the Association for Nutrition. Can I still become a nutritionist?

You can still become a nutritionist and apply to join to UK Voluntary Register of Nutritionists (UKVRN) if you have completed a degree that is not accredited with the Association for Nutrition (AfN). However, the registration process is lengthier and graduates are required to undertake an additional assessment. For further details please visit the AfN website [here](#).

What about nutritional therapy?

Nutritionists and nutritional therapists have very different roles, and there are different sets of professional standards and registration requirements. Nutritional therapists tend to work independently, seeing individuals on a one-to-one basis, using alternative treatments such as detoxification. Like nutritionists, the title nutritional therapist is not protected by law, but nutritional therapists are not eligible to register with the UK Voluntary Register of Nutritionists (UKVRN) or the Health Care Professionals Council (HCPC). However, they can register with the Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC), a self-regulated body, but this is not compulsory.

You can find out more about the work of nutritional therapists by visiting the [British Association for Applied Nutrition and Nutritional Therapy \(BANT\)](#) website.

A closer look at Dietetics

What qualifications do I need to become a dietitian?

It is necessary to have a degree approved by the Health Care Professionals Council (HCPC) to qualify to work as a dietitian. The minimum requirement is a BSc Hons in Dietetics, or a related science degree with a postgraduate diploma or higher degree in Dietetics. Further information about the undergraduate and postgraduate routes can be found on the British Dietetic Association (BDA) website <https://www.bda.uk.com/about-dietetics/how-become-a-dietitian/where-to-study-dietetics.html>. All courses require a period of supervised practise in a clinical setting.

What type of work can I do as a dietitian?

A lot of dietitians spend some or all of their time working in the community rather than solely in a hospital. Many of these are eligible to apply for registration in public health nutrition as well as being registered dietitians (RD). In the community, a dietitian's work is more about health education, although many also run clinics in doctors' surgeries for people who need specialist dietary counselling. Dietitians also work in research, the food industry, Government, non-government organisations, sports and exercise nutrition, the media, public health and education. The title 'dietitian' can only be used by trained professionals who are registered with the Health Care Professionals Council (HCPC). Registered professionals must keep up-to-date through compulsory Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Further information is available from the British Dietetic Association (BDA) (<http://www.bda.uk.com>).

Distance learning and vocational courses

I want to do a distance learning course. What are my options?

There is no distance learning route to becoming a dietitian. In order to qualify as a dietitian you must complete an approved programme of study at a UK university: either a full time undergraduate BSc Hons programme or a full-time postgraduate programme.

However, there are distance learning courses available in nutrition that offer qualifications at the end. Before choosing a distance learning course, you should check if the qualifications that you will gain are recognised by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) or the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). For further information about distance learning courses and the qualifications that can be gained from them, please visit the [Association for Nutrition](https://www.nutrition.org.uk) website.

Is BNF's online training suitable?

BNF online training courses are designed to provide an engaging way to learn about, or update knowledge in, different aspects of food and nutrition, supporting professional development. These courses are **not** meant as training for people who are looking for a career in nutrition, for which, degree level training is required. At the end of each course, a personalised certificate will be awarded, but this by no means represents an accredited nutrition qualification.

What about NVQs or diplomas?

There are a number of vocational courses available in nutrition, but these typically lead to qualifications that are below the level of undergraduate degrees (or equivalent) in the UK. A vocational qualification alone is not enough to join the [UK Voluntary Register of Nutritionists \(UKVRN\)](https://www.ukvrn.org.uk) because you will not have enough underpinning scientific knowledge to meet AfN's list of competencies. However, it is a good starting point and can help you progress towards undertaking higher level study such as a BSc.

Some speciality courses (e.g. weight management) focus upon a specific area of nutrition and do not give a broad overview or much background information. These types of courses may be more relevant to those who have already completed some form of higher education (e.g. BSc or MSc) in Nutrition or related subjects first, rather than those who are new to the area of nutrition and/or science. In addition, some courses maybe more appropriate for those who are already working within the nutrition profession, as the aim of the course may be to enhance and contribute to the individual's continuing professional development (CPD).

Work experience and internship opportunities

Where can I find work experience?

Obtaining some work experience can help to enhance your career prospects. Some universities may offer a professional work placement as part of the course, which students often find valuable in order to gain some first-hand experience in nutrition. Check with your careers department or personal tutor for opportunities. If you don't have a placement as part of your degree, you may still be able to secure a summer work placement in between study, or once you have graduated. Some food manufacturers and retailers offer internships and summer placement programmes.

In order to get some relevant nutrition experience or to volunteer in this area you could also:

- Contact the nutrition and dietetic department at your local hospital and ask whether they have any work experience places in their hospital or community departments;
- Contact your local authority. Authorities now have local responsibility for the prevention and management of obesity and may be able to advise on local schemes that you could be involved with, or local initiatives like cooking clubs;
- Work with charities involved with nutrition or supporting people's nutritional needs. Examples of such charities could include:

The Food Chain

Students studying a nutrition or dietetic degree and fully qualified dietitians can volunteer with The Food Chain, a charity that delivers meals and communal eating opportunities for people living with HIV in London. They offer a number of different volunteer roles, including assisting with interactive cooking and nutrition classes. To find out more visit <https://www.foodchain.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/>.

FoodCycle

FoodCycle is a UK charity that runs community-based projects across the UK to provide nutritious meals for people at risk of food poverty and social isolation. There are a range of projects that volunteers can get involved with, including meal preparation, workshops and fundraising. For further details visit <https://www.foodcycle.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/>.

The Trussell Trust

A UK charity providing emergency food and support to people experiencing crisis in the UK. Volunteer opportunities include assisting at foodbank centres and youth summer camps. For further details see <http://www.trusselltrust.org/volunteer>.

Royal Voluntary Service

A UK charity that provides practical and emotional support to older people. Students can volunteer on hospital wards, in shops and cafes, become a befriender or help with organising events. Further details can be found at <http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/volunteer>.

Other volunteering opportunities

You may also be able to find volunteering opportunities through the NHS, <https://www.england.nhs.uk/get-involved/get-involved/volunteering/>, or volunteering England, <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/>.

Internships

Whilst BNF does not offer work experience, we do offer internships from time to time, and these are posted on our website. BNF internships are open to undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students in human nutrition/dietetics (internships may take place during vacation periods, in between courses or after a student has finished higher education). The internships will involve nutrition science administration, specific project work and a number of smaller project related tasks. Internships typically last 3 -6 months and interns can highlight the experience on their CV and future job applications. Details of internship opportunities will be posted on the BNF website as and when they arise.

Sources of further information

- Association for Nutrition www.associationfornutrition.org
- British Association for Applied Nutrition & Nutritional Therapy www.bant.org.uk
- British Dietetic Association <http://www.bda.uk.com/>
- The Nutrition Society <http://www.nutritionandsociety.org/>
- UCAS <http://www.ucas.com/>