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Angie's List has local reviews on nutritionists

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Dietitians / Nutritionists

Healthy eating habits often include eating from each recommended major food group and limiting portion size. A registered dietitian can help direct your meal plans based on your personal preferences and medical conditions.

What a nutritionist does

Healthy eating habits include sound meal planning and a sampling of items from each of the recommended major food groups. Dietitians and nutritionists create meal plans based on your preferences for certain foods to help you adopt and maintain healthy eating habits.

Nutrition experts work in a variety of settings and often are called on to help people manage medical conditions or achieve their weight management goals. Hospitals use their skills to customize dietary programs for patients based on their current health and medical conditions. Nursing homes and independent living facilities usually staff or contract with registered dietitians to design various meal plans for their residents. Fitness centers often employ dietitians to help members who want to eat healthier, lose weight and gain muscle mass.

After evaluating a person's specific dietary needs, nutritionists develop a diet plan that is both healthy and enjoyable. If you have a medical condition such as diabetes or high blood pressure and need to avoid certain types of food, these nutrition experts will tailor a dietary plan specifically for you. If you want or need to cut back on sugary foods or lower your salt intake, he or she can give you tips on how to select low sodium foods.

Developing an eating plan

A properly trained and educated nutritionist has a thorough knowledge of all food types, including those that are healthy and those you should avoid. He or she must keep up with changing research, recommendations and guidelines. For example, the United States Department of Agriculture (U.S.D.A.) recently changed its familiar food pyramid with a simplified version called MyPlate. This new version shares some suggestions from the earlier recommendations, including a variety of fruits and vegetables, protein sources, whole grains and dairy products, in addition to healthy fats from the major food groups.

Your nutritionist will help you keep portion sizes in check to avoid overeating. He or she will also share ways you can limit your intake of high-sodium foods, sugary beverages, and eat fewer refined products, while adding whole grain foods to your diet. If you eat prepared and processed meals on a regular basis, including canned food or frozen entrées that are simply heated in the microwave, these types of foods often have high sodium levels that are not healthy for any person. However, lower sodium options have become available and your dietitian can help guide your selection or suggest easy, home-made alternatives.

A nutritionist also can give you tips to maintain healthy eating habits when you can't stick to a schedule. For example, your nutritionist can offer tips for cooking meals in advance, preparing easy to make take-along meals, and ordering meals at restaurants.

How to find a registered dietitian

The licensing requirements for people working as nutritionists vary greatly depending on where you live. Within the United States, some regions of the country have no regulations, whereas other areas enforce tighter guidelines that include certification, licensing and registration.

Before you hire a dietitian or nutritionist, check their credentials and background.

- What level of education does the nutritionist have?
- Did the dietitian have to pass an examination to become licensed and certified?

If you are considering the services of a dietitian, look for the Registered Dietician (RD) designation as proof of licensure, skills and knowledge. Angie's List provides this information in addition to member reviews and ratings for reputable nutritionists in your area.

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