

## Let's clear up the confusion between dietitians and nutritionists

Dietitians and nutritionists both focus on diet and nutrition to improve wellness and address health conditions. But, when trying to choose between a dietitian and a nutritionist, know that there are important differences in their qualifications, scope of expertise and legal requirements as practitioners.

The public may assume that dietitians and nutritionists are one and the same; but in British Columbia nutritionist is not a regulated health profession. What does that mean? It means that nutritionists are not subject to any regulatory or government oversight. It also means that the term “nutritionist” is not a protected title in BC. No specific qualifications are needed to call oneself a nutritionist – so anyone with an interest in nutrition can use it.

How is a dietitian different? Across Canada the title “dietitian” is protected by law, just like physician, pharmacist, or nurse. Only qualified nutrition professionals who are registered with a regulatory body, such as the College of Dietitians of British Columbia (CDBC), may call themselves dietitians. The CDBC is mandated by government to regulate dietitians to practice safely, ethically and competently. To be registered in BC, dietitians must have a 5-year university degree in nutrition with at least 1250 hours of supervised hands-on training; pass a national competence examination and undergo regular criminal record checks. Many dietitians also have additional degrees or certificates to enhance their skills. Dietitians are also required by law to keep their skills and knowledge up to date. And, if you have any concerns about the care you receive from a dietitian, the CDBC has a formal complaints process for recourse.

The qualifications of nutritionists vary. Many nutritionists have post secondary certificates or degrees in nutrition; while, other nutritionists may not have any formal education or practical training in the field. There is a vast range of education options for nutritionists – from private schools and public institutions; to self-help books and internet sites. Some nutritionists choose to “certify” or “register” themselves; but in BC, terms such as “certified”, “registered”, “specialist” or “therapist” (and many others) are not controlled, so anyone can use them.

Both dietitians and nutritionists focus on whole foods and nutrition to improve wellness and address health conditions. But only dietitians are uniquely and rigorously trained to provide nutrition care across the entire continuum of health – from staying healthy, getting better, living with illness or disability, to coping with end of life. Not only can dietitians provide holistic nutrition care to well people, they are the only nutrition professionals who are legally qualified to provide medical nutrition therapy in clinical settings like hospitals, diabetes clinics or cancer centres. Dietitians are also well trained to advise government on nutrition guidelines; manage food systems and food production; research new and better ways to enhance care, promote health and prevent nutrition-related illnesses; and, educate future dietitians and health care professionals.

When it comes to choosing a nutrition care provider, you can trust a Registered Dietitian to provide you with safe, ethical, competent and science backed care. Check that your nutrition care provider is a regulated health professional by visiting the College of Dietitians of BC's [public register of dietitians](#). To find a dietitian near you please visit [Dietitians of Canada – Find a Dietitian](#). Or, you can access free dietitian support, through [Healthlink BC](#), by calling 8-1-1. For more information on regulated health professions in BC visit [www.bchealthregulators.ca](#).

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