

EARLY HEAD START TIP SHEET

No. 7

What are the differences between a registered dietitian (RD) and a nutritionist?

Response:

A **registered dietitian (RD)** is a person who has satisfied the academic and experiential requirements established by the American Dietetic Association's (ADA) Commission on Dietetics Registration (CDR). "RD" is a nationally recognized professional credential, which is conferred by the ADA. At a minimum, an RD holds a bachelor's degree in nutrition, nutrition sciences, and/or dietetics. In addition to food science and meal planning courses, a dietetics curriculum includes nutrition through life's cycle, clinical dietetics, medical-nutrition therapy, education methodology, human development and anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, microbiology, and social science. In order to remain registered, an RD must meet the continuing professional education requirements of ADA that includes at a minimum seventy-five hours per five-year period, and/or a professional portfolio with targeted ADA-approved professional development goals and objectives. A registered dietitian combines the art and science of the profession — to assist individuals and communities in achieving their respective nutritional needs and goals. This includes individualized nutritional plans for persons with special medical diets, and eating plans for persons with special needs and disabilities. All registered dietitians are nutritionists.

RD-eligible means that the professional holds a bachelor's degree in nutrition and dietetics **and** either has completed an internship in dietetics or an approved pre-professional practice program and is ready to take the examination.

Additionally, the title **nutritionist** does not represent a nationally recognized professional credential. In fact, in those states and U.S. territories without nutrition or dietetic licensure laws, the term may be completely unregulated. Anyone in these states may call himself/herself a nutritionist, despite the presence or absence of relevant academic preparation, training, and/or continuing education in human nutrition. Therefore, not all nutritionists are registered dietitians.

In some instances, a nutritionist may hold a bachelor's degree in food, nutrition and dietetics, but may not hold the CDR's registration credential. Often, this individual has not completed a relevant internship or pre-professional practice program, and/or has not passed the national examination test necessary for registered dietitians.

The term **certified nutritionist** may also vary tremendously in states that do not have dietetic licensure laws.

In some states, licensure is required to practice as a nutritionist. Licensure may be in addition to a RD status, or may be independent of it. Licensure can be renewable annually or upon another state-determined schedule. Some state licensure laws require the professional to complete a specific amount of continuing education hours as well as pay an annual, or other state-specific schedule of fees. With state licensure, professional suffixes vary from state to state. State licensure is the reason you may see titles, in addition to RD, such as the following:

- **LN** - licensed nutritionist
- **LD** - licensed dietitian
- **LDN** - licensed dietitian and nutritionist
- **CDN** - certified dietitian and nutritionist
- **CD** - certified dietitian

Some of our programs are having difficulties hiring or contracting with an RD or nutritionist. For this reason some programs are hiring dietary managers. These professionals may not necessarily have the expertise to help programs meet the Performance Standards 1304.23 (a-e).

Considerations:

- What community nutritional issues does the program face? How do the program's nutritional services address these issues?
- How does the program use the support of a registered dietitian or nutritionist in its nutritional services?
- How does the program assist families and staff in identifying nutritional needs of each child?
- How does the program ensure the menu meets $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ of each child's daily nutritional needs?
- How does the program ensure that meals served are high in nutrients, low in sugar and salt, and have adequate amounts of fat according to the age and health condition of each child?
- How does the program accommodate medical diets and other special diets?
- How does the program deal with feeding problems or special nutritional needs?
- How does the program support nutritional education and involvement of parents, families, pregnant women, and staff in areas including the selection and preparation of foods, food budgeting, breast feeding, and discussion of the nutritional status of their child?

Performance Standards, Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations:

- **1304.23** Child Nutrition (a) Identification of Nutritional Needs (b) Nutritional Services
- (c) Meal Services (d) Family Assistance with Nutrition (e) Food Safety and Sanitation
- **1304.52(d)(3)** Nutrition services must be supported by staff or consultants who are registered dietitians or nutritionists.
- **1304.40(c)(1)(i)** Early Head Start grantee and delegate agencies must assist pregnant women to access comprehensive prenatal and postpartum care, through referrals, immediately after enrollment in the program. This care must include early and continuing risk assessments, which include an assessment of nutritional status as well as nutrition counseling and food assistance, if necessary.
- **1304.40(f)(1)** Grantee and delegate agencies must provide medical, dental, nutrition, and mental health education programs for program staff, parents, and families.

Resources:

Commission on Dietetic Registration. The credentialing agency for The American Dietetic Association.

<http://www.eatright.org/cdr.html>

American Dietetic Association The web site, as well as your state's American Dietetic Association chapter, can aid in finding a local RD.

www.eatright.org

The American Dietetic Association has a national RD locator service. They can be reached at 800-877-1600.

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Programs often have an RD at some level, but not all levels, of service.

Local hospital or health department may also assist in finding an RD.

Local EHS/Head Start Health Services Advisory Committees

Registered Dietitians

07/02

The Tip Sheet is not a regulatory document. Its intent is to provide a basis for dialogue, clarification, and problem solving among the Head Start Bureau, Regional Offices, T & TA consultants, and grantees.