

Dietitian

Join the team and
make a difference

Dietitians make sense of how food affects us. They provide practical information to promote healthy eating and help in the treatment of disease. Much of their work is with patients who need special diets because of eating disorders, kidney or liver problems, cancer or diabetes, or after major surgery.

What will you do?

Dietitians work in hospitals or are based in community healthcare teams. You will be working in collaboration with doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals to support patients whose quality of life is linked closely with their diet. You will be making assessments of their needs, developing an appropriate diet and advising on how to lead a healthier lifestyle.

For instance, a patient may have difficulty swallowing so you will have to devise a diet that enables him or her to get sufficient calories and protein in a form that can be digested. Or you may be treating a patient whose symptoms are triggered or increased by eating particular foods so you'll need to plan a diet that avoids these foods. You may



also be supporting people who are unable to eat at all after major surgery or serious injury. It's your job to ensure they continue to receive the nutrition and information they need.

There is also a range of conditions in which diet plays a major part such as diabetes. You will be working closely with other healthcare professionals to ensure the individual has the necessary information to manage their condition.

Where will you work?

You are likely to work in one or more of the following settings:

- in hospitals
- in local clinics and health centres
- in care homes and in people's own homes
- in children's services, prisons, and social services.

What skills and qualities will you need?

- awareness of food and how diet affects health
- a caring, positive attitude to people
- good communication skills
- being able to work on your own and in co-operation with others
- a responsible, professional approach

Whether you see patients in the community, in hospital or their own homes, you will use the most up-to-date public health and scientific research on food, health and disease and translate this into practical guidance to help people make appropriate lifestyle and food choices.

It's important that you are able to engage with patients and carers in developing diets that they are able to adopt in their daily lives. On a broader scale, you could also be working with local community groups to encourage healthier eating and improve cooking skills, taking account of different cultural and social attitudes to food and drink.

What entry routes are available?

To become a qualified dietitian in the NHS you will need to complete a degree course in dietetics that is recognised by the Health Professions Council (HPC). You could also complete a postgraduate diploma or MSc if you already have a relevant science degree.

Degree programmes take three or four years, full time, combining study with clinical placements. For graduates, the diploma course takes two years. The NHS provides financial support to eligible students on NHS-funded courses. For more information, visit www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/students. Once you have qualified, you will need to register with the HPC to practise as a dietitian.

There are opportunities to join the NHS as a dietetic assistant. They work with dietitians

in hospitals and the community, helping patients manage their special dietary requirements and monitoring their progress. There are no formal educational requirements for the role of dietetic assistant, and training will be given on the job. For further information, see the *Clinical support worker* factsheet.

How can you develop your career?

Food and diet is becoming increasingly recognised as a key component in health, and as your clinical experience increases you can move into more senior posts and specialise in a particular area such as diabetes, children's health, cancer or surgery. Opportunities exist in research and teaching to develop the profession further.

As well as moving to more senior and specialised roles within this area, you will also have the chance to take on additional responsibilities and progress within the organisation, as part of the Career Framework. For more information about this initiative please see the *Careers in the allied health professions* booklet.

Pay

The national pay system in the NHS is called Agenda for Change (AfC). This applies to all staff except doctors, dentists and very senior managers. These are examples of roles and the AfC bands at which they may be paid: dietitian (Band 5); dietitian – specialist (Band 6); dietitian – advanced (Band 7). To find out more about pay bands, and to see the most up-to-date salary information, visit

www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/payandbenefits

For more information on the range of opportunities available in the allied health professions, please visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/qualifications. This gives more specific details about what qualifications are necessary for each role. You can search for current vacancies and download job descriptions at www.jobs.nhs.uk

To find out more about careers in the allied health professions, please visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/working

For more information on the professional bodies relevant to the allied health professions, visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/contacts