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Dietetic assistant

Dietetic assistants are vital in helping people with their diet and nutrition. They help people by advising them on how their food choices can lead to more fulfilling and healthier lives.

Working life

Dietetic assistants work with dietitians on food and nutrition while assessing, diagnosing and treating dietary and nutritional problems. The dietetic team also inform, teach and advise the public and healthcare professionals about the importance of diet and nutrition in staying fit and healthy.

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In hospitals dietetic assistants may:

- help patients choose from the hospital menu
- order supplies for the department
- monitor a patient's food
- input data on patients' records
- show patients how to use feeding tubes and pumps
- weigh patients
- explain a patient's diet and nutrition plan

Dietetic assistants working with individuals and in the local communities will help healthy and sick people with their dietary needs. They could work with people who:

- have digestive problems
- want to lose weight
- have a condition which affects their ability to eat, such as cancer
- need to put on weight after an illness
- are HIV
- have an eating disorder
- have an allergy

Dietetic assistants work in hospitals, clinics and in the community. They may visit patients in their homes or in residential or care homes if patients cannot travel. Dietetic assistants may visit schools, nurseries and other community settings to talk to individuals and groups about diet and nutrition. As well as working closely with dietitians, dietetic assistants work with other healthcare professionals including nurses. They have a lot of contact with patients.



Entry requirements

There are no set entry requirements for dietetic assistants. Employers expect good numeracy and literacy and some experience or qualifications in health or social care. Employers may ask for GCSEs in English and maths. Science may also be useful. Employers may ask for an NVQ, BTEC or equivalent qualification in health and social care or healthcare.

Employers often ask for relevant work experience. Even where this is not specified, it would be an advantage if you have worked in health or social care, either in paid employment or voluntary work. If you're applying for a role in the NHS you'll be asked to show how you think the NHS values apply in your everyday work.

Skills and personal characteristics needed

To be a dietetic assistant, you'll need

- an interest in science and food
- an interest in people and their lifestyles
- a positive and motivating attitude
- an understanding approach
- patience

You'll also need

- an understanding of science
- be able to explain complex things simply
- organisation skills
- communication skills

Training and development

You will receive appropriate training in order to do the job. This includes an introduction to the department, how to use the equipment and the procedures to follow. You may be offered the chance to study for qualifications such as:

- the NCFE CACHE level 2 Certificate in Healthcare Support Services
- the NCFE CACHE level 3 Diploma in Healthcare Support

You may also be able to gain qualifications by doing an apprenticeship.

Some dietetic assistants join the British Dietetic Association [3] (BDA) as associate members. The BDA runs courses, conferences and seminars where dietetic assistants can update their skills and network with

others doing similar work.

With experience and some additional training, you could train as an assistant practitioner [4] or as a dietitian [5].

Pay and benefits

Your standard working week will be around 37.5 hours and may include a mix of shifts, such as nights, early starts, evenings and weekends. As a dietetic assistant, you'll be paid on the Agenda for Change (AFC [6]) pay system, typically starting on band 2.

You'll also have access to our generous pension scheme and health service discounts, as well as 27 days of annual leave, plus bank holidays, which increases the longer you're in service.

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[4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/clinical-support-staff/assistant-practitioner>

[5] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/allied-health-professionals/dietitian>

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