

Registered Dietitians: What to Expect



1. What qualifications does one need to have to be designated as a Registered Dietitian in Ontario?

To be a Registered Dietitian, one must successfully complete an accredited 4-year university program, an accredited dietetic internship, and pass the Canadian Dietetic Registration Examination. They must also register with the College of Dietitians of Ontario.



2. What is a registered dietitian and what services do they provide?

Registered Dietitians are regulated health professionals who are experts on food and nutrition. They help individuals, families and communities understand the connection between food and health. Dietitians are trained to translate the most up-to-date scientific nutrition research into practical guidance relevant to their client's health and nutrition-related goals.

Some dietitians work in settings as part of a team of healthcare professionals like doctors, psychologists and speech and language pathologists. Dietitians can also work alone, in grocery stores, as part of a clinic or private practice and may provide virtual or in-person appointments.

A dietitian works together with their client to collect and assess information regarding health, diet and lifestyle. They use this information to create personalized nutrition care plans that meet their client's nutrition needs and goals. When creating nutrition care plans, dietitians also take into consideration their client's culture, food traditions, taste preferences, food skills, budget and health conditions to ensure all nutrition advice is tailored to them.

3. What is the difference between a dietitian and a nutritionist?

The title "nutritionist" is not regulated in the province of Ontario. This means that there are no education requirements to use the title "nutritionist".

In Ontario, the title "Registered Dietitian" (including "dietitian and "RD") is protected. This means that only those who have successfully completed the above qualifications.

Registered Dietitians are regulated by the College of Dietitians of Ontario and must participate in annual quality assurance programs. The College of Dietitians of Ontario works for the public to make sure that Registered Dietitians are held accountable to a high standard

of education and ethics.

To find a Registered Dietitian near you, please visit [Find a Dietitian](#) on the Dietitians of Canada website. To check whether an individual is registered with the College of Dietitians of Ontario, you can search their name on the [Register of Dietitians](#).

4. Do dietitians specialize in providing service/ support to people with autism?

Currently, there is no specific dietetic training program that provides a specialized designation to work in the area of nutrition and autism. That being said, there are many dietitians who support the nutrition needs of autistic people. Most dietitians that work with autistic people have gained their knowledge from current research, as well as experience working with this population.

5. Why might an autistic person want to see a dietitian?

A dietitian can help support a range of nutrition-related questions, concerns, and goals common among autistic people. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Ensuring nutrition intake is appropriately supporting growth and development
- Exploring strategies to manage food fixations and aversions
- Managing constipation or digestive concerns
- Building cooking and meal planning skills to foster independence
- Managing medication-related side effects
- Navigating allergies and intolerances

Current research does not recommend a specific dietary pattern for autistic people, other than following a balanced diet according to Canada's Food Guide. It is recommended that anyone thinking about trying a specialized diet consult a Registered Dietitian first. They will be able to provide the most recent evidence-based recommendations and help make the decisions that are best for one's health and well-being.

If your child experiences sensory challenges, a Registered Dietitian can work with your child to explore these challenges to help improve their quality of life and nutrition intake. This can include exploring sensory challenges related to the dining experience, such as noise, lights and surrounding activity, or challenges related to texture, colour, smell, or taste aversions.

Food chaining is one example of a strategy dietitians may use to work on expanding the variety of foods your child may eat. This strategy involves slowly building acceptance for new food items by linking these to a similar feature of the foods that your child already likes to eat. For example, if your child enjoys eating chicken nuggets, an early step might be exploring different brands of chicken nuggets. As your child gradually becomes accustomed to accepting slightly different foods, the new foods that are introduced will evolve to other

similar, yet new foods, such as baked chicken breast.

6. What else do I need to be aware of when looking for a dietitian who is knowledgeable about supporting people with autism and other conditions?

Every autistic person is unique so nutrition-related goals will vary from person to person. Before reaching out to a Registered Dietitian, it may be helpful to make a list of the relevant nutrition-related needs, including any food aversions or preferences, or specific cultural considerations that are important to you. This will help the dietitian determine if they would be a good fit to support those needs, or whether they can refer you to another dietitian who may have more relevant expertise.

7. Many autistic people experience sensory challenges; how can a dietitian mitigate this during an appointment?

If your child experiences sensory challenges related to their environment, let your dietitian know this so they can work with you to help make your child feel safe and comfortable during the counselling experience.

8. Can a dietitian work with other professionals in supporting autistic people, such as behavioural clinicians, occupational therapists, or physicians?

As dietitians are registered health professionals, they can refer and consult with other health professionals that are within their client's circle of care, if they have client consent. This means that they can share information regarding a client's nutrition care plan with other members of their health care team, which helps provide them with more holistic and coordinated care. This could look like the dietitian communicating progress about food texture aversions with their occupational therapist, or their physician providing lab reports so their dietitian can better assess the status of nutrient deficiencies.

9. What is the typical fee for a dietitian? Is there funding available to families for a dietitian's services?

All fees that Registered Dietitians charge for their nutrition services are regulated by the College of Dietitians of Ontario. This is done in the best interest of the public and helps ensure that dietitian services can remain accessible to communities.

In Ontario, the average fee is \$125 for an initial one-hour nutrition assessment and \$69-97 for 30-45 minute follow-up appointments. Fees may vary by region.

There is currently no government funding available to access dietitian services in Ontario. However, some health benefit plans cover dietitian services, and some dietitians may have

the ability to bill directly to certain insurance companies. If you are unsure whether you have coverage, it is best to call your plan provider to check.

About Sydney Brennan, MAD, RD

Sydney Brennan is a Registered Dietitian who is passionate about providing inclusive nutrition care that empowers the clients and communities she works with. She completed her undergraduate and Master's degree in Applied Human Nutrition at the University of Guelph and completed her clinical dietetic internship at the Guelph General Hospital. During her career as a Registered Dietitian for Sobeys, she has specialized in the areas of nutrition education, program planning and resource development. Sydney also has a background working as a peer facilitator with autistic children and youth and is passionate about integrating nutrition into the healthcare plan.

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