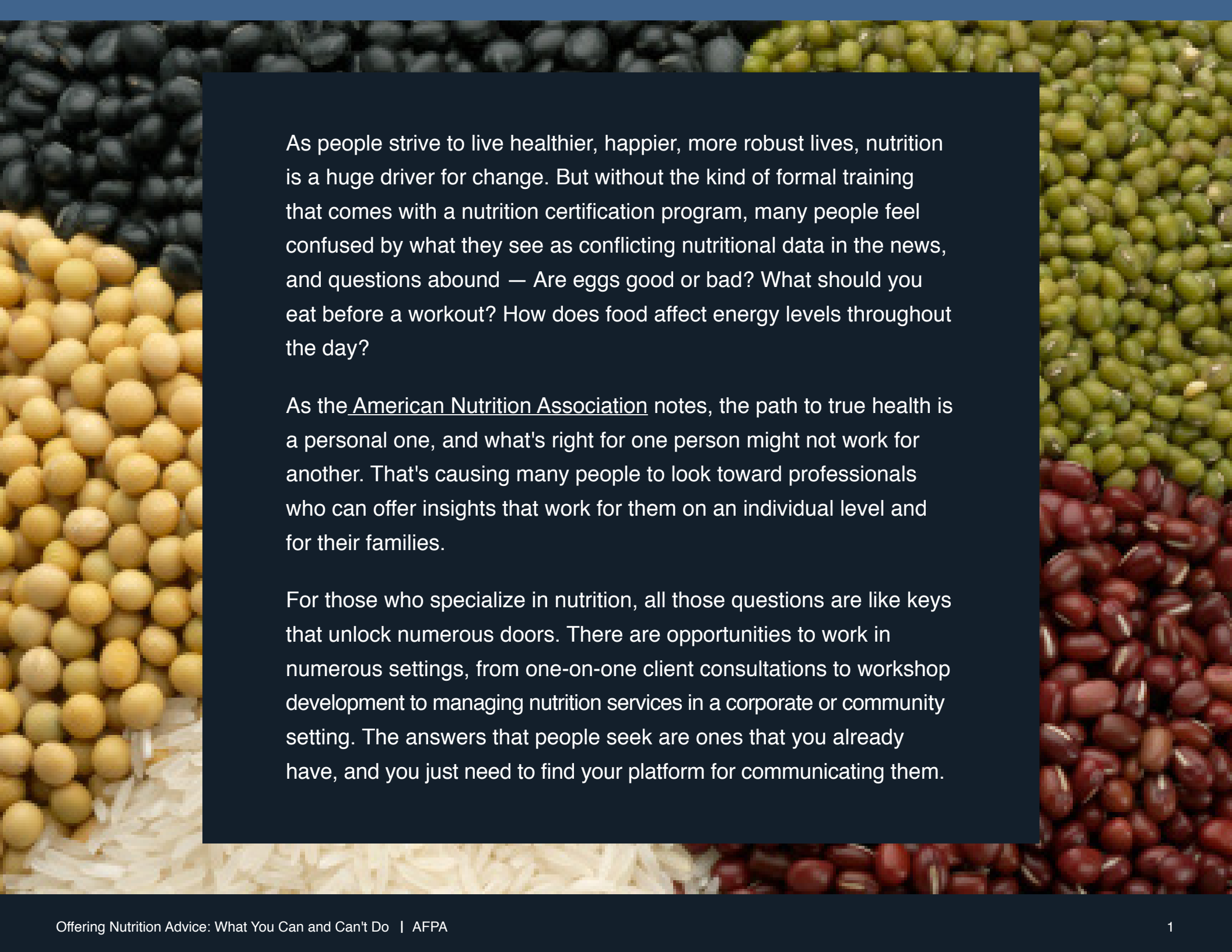


The background of the image is a dark, textured wooden surface. Several fresh green asparagus spears are arranged in a horizontal line across the top and bottom. In the bottom right corner, there is a decorative silver bowl filled with a variety of spices, including white peppercorns, red peppercorns, and black peppercorns.

Offering Nutrition Advice: What You Can and Can't Do

Use your certification to empower and help clients—
without going beyond your scope of practice





As people strive to live healthier, happier, more robust lives, nutrition is a huge driver for change. But without the kind of formal training that comes with a nutrition certification program, many people feel confused by what they see as conflicting nutritional data in the news, and questions abound — Are eggs good or bad? What should you eat before a workout? How does food affect energy levels throughout the day?

As the [American Nutrition Association](#) notes, the path to true health is a personal one, and what's right for one person might not work for another. That's causing many people to look toward professionals who can offer insights that work for them on an individual level and for their families.

For those who specialize in nutrition, all those questions are like keys that unlock numerous doors. There are opportunities to work in numerous settings, from one-on-one client consultations to workshop development to managing nutrition services in a corporate or community setting. The answers that people seek are ones that you already have, and you just need to find your platform for communicating them.

But with that opportunity comes responsibility. As a nutrition professional, it's crucial to know what kind of advice is appropriate to offer, so you can help clients live their best lives in a healthy way—without stepping beyond recommended guidelines.

This ebook will give you some ideas on what you can do and what you can't, so you can focus on the areas where your insights and knowledge will truly make a difference.



What You Can Do



Many people pursue [nutrition certifications](#) after developing a personal interest in the subject, and then wanting to extend that passion to others. But getting educated is the just the start of a long, productive, and exciting journey that involves numerous aspects of supporting clients. Here are some of the many directions you can take with a certification:

Assess and evaluate: One of the most important aspects of any nutritional plan is to understand where a client is at the present moment. This includes what a "normal" day of eating is like, but also includes information about physical activity, stress levels, sleep issues, medical conditions, digestion, and past health problems. Also at play are weight and age, which can both be major factors when it comes to nutritional advice.

As a certified nutritional professional, you can take all of these into account when doing an assessment of an individual, in order to develop recommendations that promote a healthy lifestyle. By understanding a client in-depth, you'll be able to work together to set goals and create a comprehensive strategy.





Develop meal plans: Turning an assessment into action is an exhilarating part of nutrition counseling, and for most people, that starts with meal plans. These can be as simple as specifying what should be in each meal or snack for the next few days as a client transitions to a whole-food approach. Or it can encompass a wide range of factors, like what to eat at different times of day based on physical activity, how to time food with medication schedules, or what to choose to meet certain weight loss or maintenance goals.

Because of the education you receive while earning a certification, you'll be able to take factors like these into account, as well as many others. One client may need help with ditching junk food, for example, while another is trying to optimize nutrition while training for a marathon. You'll be able to customize meal plans based on client needs.

Go food shopping with clients: Client education is a huge part of nutritional consultation. Although clients may appreciate specific recommendations at the start of working together, most ultimately want to know how to make their own decisions about healthy food choices. That insight can start in the grocery store.

Shopping with clients is a great strategy for hands-on advice. You can teach clients how to read food labels, why serving sizes matter, whether vitamin content makes a difference, and whether to choose one product over another. A major aspect of food shopping will naturally be the produce section, and that's where you can really contribute to their knowledge. Some people have never been taught how to pick produce in an effective way — they may not be able to tell if a melon is ripe, for example — or they could feel intimidated by unfamiliar fruits and vegetables. Guiding them through the shopping experience is a stellar way to help them educate themselves on all the aspects of fresh foods, which usually leads to higher consumption of those healthy items.





Teach workshops and classes: Similar to helping clients shop, you can extend your education to groups by developing workshops or other classes about nutrition and how it fits in with a healthy lifestyle.

Many certified nutrition professionals put together classes that are held at community centers, schools, gyms, co-ops, farmers markets, senior living centers, and other places where you can find a diverse set of students. There are many advantages to creating these short programs. Not only will you raise the level of awareness about healthy eating among these groups, but you may also find new clients this way.

Provide recommendations based on evidence: As part of your own education, you'll learn how to evaluate scientific evidence like research studies. This ability will be hugely valuable for creating foundational knowledge of nutrition and how it relates to wellness, food behaviors, diseases, physical activity, and behavior change.

With that foundation, you can provide recommendations that go beyond what to eat. For example, you might use scientific research to make recommendations about nutritional supplementation, or to gently point out to a client that a fad diet he's following may not be the best approach. Just as you've learned to distinguish sound nutritional information from unreliable information, you can pass that knowledge on to clients and make it into a series of recommendations.

Suggest ways to incorporate nutrition with other lifestyle changes: As part of learning about nutritional research and information, you'll also have unique insight into how nutrition affects other aspects of someone's life. Because of that, you can make suggestions that are about far more than what's on a plate.

For instance, you may have a client that's concerned about how often she's snapping at co-workers and feeling overwhelmed by stress. She also tells you she's not sleeping well, and has a sour stomach from the four large lattes she drinks before 10am. After some time, she expresses concern about how rapidly she's gaining weight, and how much she hates the afternoon "crash" that prompts even more coffee consumption.

Obviously, there's a great deal at play with this client. As a certified nutrition professional, you're not just going to work up a meal plan filled with vegetables, healthy fats, and good protein and call it done. Nutrition will be an essential element in your recommendations for her, but you'll also be able to

articulate how nutritional changes can sync up with other lifestyle shifts, like developing good sleep habits, incorporating physical activity into her day, regulating her energy through food instead of coffee, and delegating work tasks when necessary.

As you've learned while earning your certification, nutrition is rarely a standalone solution to a client's issues. You need to look at behavior, habits, and lifestyle — and more than that, you'll have the ability to have your client look at those aspects as well.

“you can make suggestions that are about far more than what's on a plate.”



Review lab results: While you won't be able to order lab tests, you can review the findings if a client provides them. For instance, a vitamin and mineral lab test might reveal deficiencies that could lead to recommendations about nutritional wellness supplementation.

Many people feel confused by lab results when they get them, and they may feel like they just want straightforward insight about how to interpret them. As a nutrition professional, you won't be able to answer all their questions — unless you moonlight as a radiologist or lab tech — but you can at least help them understand terms like "baseline" and "deviation."

You'll also be able to consult with clients' medical practitioners if that's what a client prefers. This can be a valuable way to form a professional team that's in the best interest of the client.

Provide ongoing support: Although some clients will be looking for a brief consultation period to address certain food issues, many will benefit from a long-term relationship that takes them through numerous goals, not just one.

Because you'll have the insights you need to help with planning, assessment, education, and behavior change, you'll be able to provide the support they need. For instance, a client may come to you looking for weight loss help. Once he reaches his goal weight, he might have already incorporated other changes into his life, like doing strength training, and now he needs fresh insight to take him to a new goal. Or he might want to reduce his medication for a certain condition, and asks you to consult with his physician about the best way to bolster that decision with good nutrition.

As a certified nutrition professional, you really do have the opportunity to empower people and encourage them to take charge of their lives. Your training, insights, and recommendations can all combine to grow your consulting practice. As you spend more time in the field, you'll find that what's been listed here are just a few of the strategies you can do.





Fortunately, the list of what you can't do as a nutritional professional is much shorter than what you can do. Rather than seeing the list below as a series of limitations, just consider them as helpful guidelines to keep in mind as you explore the many other opportunities that nutritional consulting can bring.

Practice medical nutrition or treat a disease: Those who have [job titles](#), like certified clinical nutritionist, registered dietitians and registered dietician nutritionist may specialize in medical nutrition, which addresses specific health conditions like diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and kidney disease, among many others. As a certified nutrition professional, you can develop meal plans that may ease symptoms of diagnosed conditions, but you can't say that you're treating these issues.

For example, you might offer a "heart-healthy diet" meal plan, but you can't tell a client that you're treating her heart disease directly through nutrition. It can be a subtle distinction, but an important one. You're offering recommendations for nutritional changes, but not treatment for medical conditions.

“As a certified nutrition professional, you can develop meal plans that may ease symptoms of diagnosed conditions, but you can't say that you're treating these issues.”



Also stay away from talk about "curing" a condition. Even if your nutrition advice reverses or eliminates a medical issue — and that happens quite often — be careful in saying that you cured a client. You can say that you provided advice and support that resulted in beneficial changes.

Make unproven health or nutrition claims: As you know from studying nutrition, the field is always changing. That can lead to some studies that grab headlines, or some personal anecdotes that wash over social media for a few days.

Your education emphasized how to use evidence-based research and information to help clients, so it's better to stick to what's been proven through rigorous methods than gravitating toward claims that might be questionable. When you're on the fence about whether a health or nutrition claim is legitimate, do your research before you feel comfortable sharing that with a client. And remember, the claim shouldn't be one that implies medical treatment, diagnosis, or cure.

These claims also apply to any methods, devices, assessments, or therapies. Even if you find any of those to be helpful, it's much better to go with what's proven, especially if it's legitimate because of established research.

Use product sales in conjunction with client recommendations: There are many excellent products on the market when it comes to nutrition support, and some have some strong research behind their efficacy. But if you believe your client could benefit from them, have someone else do the selling.

Joining product sales with client assessments and recommendations can often look like a biased approach. For example, a client may think that you advised him to take a certain supplement because you also happen to be a sales representative for a company that sells just such a supplement. That leads to a loss of trust in the client-consultant connection.

Trust is everything when it comes to clients. They come to you for advice and expertise, and they need to know that you have their best interests in mind. You're doing everything you can to help them lead healthier, more fulfilling lives. Eroding that trust in any way — through product sales, medical diagnoses, or promotion of unproven claims —

can have a long-term and negative impact on your client relationships.

Instead, focus on building trust and maintaining it through assessments, recommendations, and support that are given in an appropriate and beneficial way. There's so much you can do as a nutrition professional, and embracing that trust is part of working to expand your reach in the field.

State Guidelines

Specific rules can vary by state, especially when it comes to who can dispense nutrition advice that has a treatment-type basis.

For example, in Minnesota, it's legal for professionals in a wide array of professions — including chiropractors, fitness trainers, acupuncturists, and herbalists — to give nutrition advice. The state does caution that there may be limitations on insurance reimbursement eligibility when seeing these types of professionals for nutrition plans. But in North Carolina, the state is stricter in regulating which professionals can offer nutrition advice.

Before you begin practicing and taking on clients, be sure to review the [latest guidelines in your state](#) since they can change without much public notice.

Using Your Insights

To learn more about certifications, including specifics on coursework, visit the [AFPA website](#). Our accredited certification programs are centered around what you need to know to succeed, and are designed to meet the evolving needs of the nutrition field.

What you can do with a nutrition certification makes a difference in people's lives. From helping them optimize health to meeting family needs to addressing specific health concerns, nutrition is key.

Being an expert guide in navigating the river of information that's in the field is a valued and much-needed service. By thinking about what you can do — and simply sidestepping what you can't — it creates a wealth of opportunities, for you and your clients.

