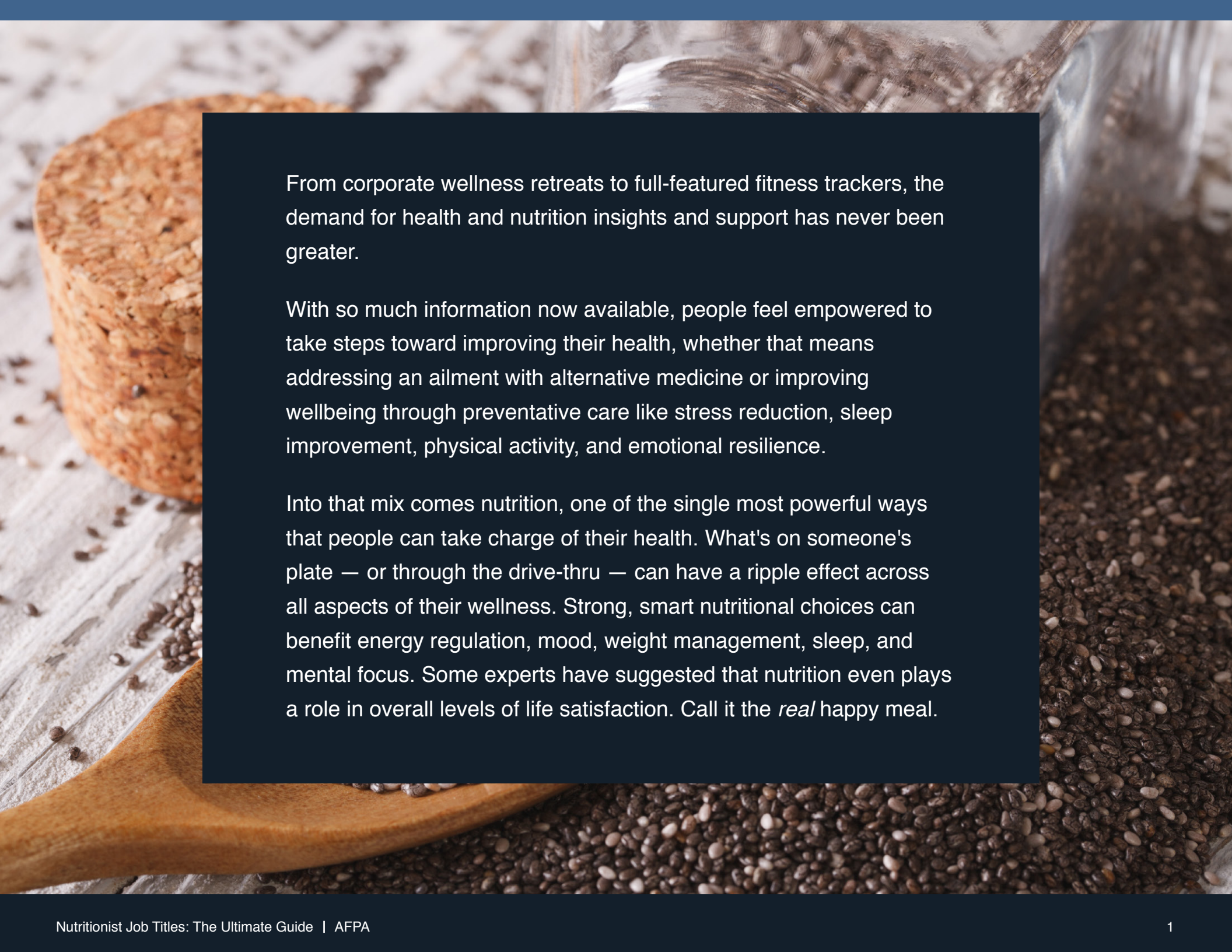




Nutritionist Job Titles: The Ultimate Guide

Learn what you can and can't call yourself
once you earn your nutrition certification





From corporate wellness retreats to full-featured fitness trackers, the demand for health and nutrition insights and support has never been greater.

With so much information now available, people feel empowered to take steps toward improving their health, whether that means addressing an ailment with alternative medicine or improving wellbeing through preventative care like stress reduction, sleep improvement, physical activity, and emotional resilience.

Into that mix comes nutrition, one of the single most powerful ways that people can take charge of their health. What's on someone's plate — or through the drive-thru — can have a ripple effect across all aspects of their wellness. Strong, smart nutritional choices can benefit energy regulation, mood, weight management, sleep, and mental focus. Some experts have suggested that nutrition even plays a role in overall levels of life satisfaction. Call it the *real* happy meal.

Yet, despite the importance of good nutrition, physicians tend to skip over nutrition in their consultations, mainly because they lack comprehensive nutrition education in their medical training.¹

That's led many people to turn to experts when deciding what to eat. They're increasingly relying on professionals with nutritional training to help them navigate the challenges of meal plans and food choices. 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 on those personalized choices.

Given the extent of that demand, the opportunities in the field abound.

But with great opportunity comes questions: What kind of education and certifications are available?

What can you call yourself when you're ready to see clients or apply for a position? What terms, phrases, and job titles should you avoid? This ebook will address these questions and more.



Education Options



Before diving into the specifics of titles, it's important to note that there are two main tracks you can follow when it comes to nutrition education. Choosing one or the other is usually the first step toward becoming a nutrition professional, although it's entirely possible to blend them in some way as well:



College degree:

Some universities offer a Bachelor of Science in nutrition and/or dietetics.

Much like any other degree, this usually involves at least four years of higher education, and it can be done online, at a school, or with a blend of those two approaches. After some time in the field, some nutrition professionals decide to increase their education by completing a master's or doctorate degree. Those advanced degrees are usually undertaken to pursue a teaching or research position.

✓ Pros

Potentially more opportunities in the field, including working at hospitals and healthcare systems.

✗ Cons

Takes four years, and requires standard college tuition fees.



Certification:

Geared toward a career of helping clients achieve nutrition goals a certification program focuses on both nutrition basics and the complexities that can come up in the field. Some programs offer a specialized approach, such as education that focuses on weight management or sports nutrition. There are some in-person programs, but many people choose to do their education through distance learning.

✓ Pros

Usually takes about six months, and is much more affordable than college tuition.

✗ Cons

May not be suitable for some positions that require a degree.

With those main tracks in mind, let's take a look at the kinds of job titles that can come from nutrition education.

Nutritionist Job Titles



Although nutrition-related titles may sound similar, they can be very different when it comes to educational requirements, job duties, and typical workplaces.

Registered Dietician

A registered dietitian (RD) is essentially the same as a newer designation, a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN). The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' Board of Directors created the newer title as a way to further enhance opportunities for RDNs.

Either way, here's what it includes:

Education: Bachelor's degree with [coursework that typically includes](#) food and nutrition sciences, foodservice systems management, business, economics, computer science, sociology, biochemistry, physiology, microbiology, and chemistry. RDs and RDNs must also complete an accredited, supervised practice program at a health care facility, food service corporation, or community agency.



Where you could work: Hospitals, schools, government agencies, corporate nutrition programs, food companies, long-term care facilities, community health programs.

Job duties: Depending on where you choose to work, your job may include explaining nutrition to individual clients or groups, developing meal plans, promoting nutrition through public speaking, and putting together community outreach programs. Some RDs and RDNs choose to pursue more education in order to become researchers or professors.

Quick facts:

- About 50 percent of registered dietitians hold advanced degrees.
- Some pursue certifications in specialized areas of practice such as pediatric nutrition or diabetes education.
- Specialties within the profession include community dietitians who work on public health issues, management dietitians who specialize in overseeing meal preparation programs in corporations or schools, and clinical dietitians (more on that next).
- RDs and RDNs must renew their credentials every five years, and apply for licensure or certification based on their state laws.

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Clinical Nutritionist

Also called a Certified Clinical Nutritionist (CCN), this specialization focuses on providing medical nutrition therapy, usually in a healthcare setting. Some registered dietitians also become CCNs in order to do more work in the medical field, but it's also possible to be a clinical nutritionist without first getting an RD degree. Here's what to expect:

Education: Bachelor's degree that focuses on the medical applications of nutrition, such as how to use certain foods to treat diseases, and how digestion affects the body. CCNs often focus on the mechanics of nutrition, with [coursework that may include](#) immune function, metabolic shifts, gastrointestinal health, and neurological responses to nutrition. Academic requirements are chemistry, anatomy, microbiology, biochemistry, biology, and advanced nutrition courses.

Where you could work: Hospitals, research facilities, pharmaceutical companies, hospice care, clinics, health systems, treatment programs

Job duties: Because of the focus on medical nutrition therapy, most CCNs are found doing work within healthcare such as creating meal plans for hospital or health facility patients, doing one-on-one counseling for specific health conditions, and developing nutrition plans based on lab results and medical assessments.

Quick facts:

- If you have an associates degree in nursing, you would be qualified to take the CCN certification as long as you obtained the [core nutrition coursework](#) that's required by the Clinical Nutrition Certification Board.
- CCNs must be recertified every five years.
- Most clinical nutritionists usually complete a lengthy internship and must do a 56-hour course focusing on certification.



Certified Nutrition Consultant

Those who want to provide nutritional counseling through a more accelerated timeframe (and on a more affordable basis), may want to consider becoming a Certified Nutrition Consultant. These professionals help clients meet nutritional and lifestyle goals, and are also sometimes called Certified Nutrition and Wellness Consultants.

Education: Completion of a certification program or series of certification programs, usually with the prerequisite of having a high school diploma, GED, or international equivalent. This is often done in six months or less. Reputable programs meet standards for accreditation from nationally recognized organizations such as the Naturopathic Medical Accreditation Board.

Where you could work: Self-employed as a nutritional and wellness consultant, food supplement distributors, corporate wellness centers, weight loss centers, health food and nutrition retail stores, health and wellness publications, schools, community programs.

Job duties: The certification allows you to give educated nutritional guidance that might include developing nutritional plans for individual clients, creating workshops that can be presented at schools or companies, and providing support to groups with specific goals like weight loss or disease management. Using current scientific research, you can construct a foundation for wellness nutrition and help people meet their goals.

Quick Facts:

- Graduating from an accredited program will make you eligible to expand your credentials by applying to be a Board Certified Holistic Health Care Practitioner, Board Certified Nutritional Consultant, or Board Certified Holistic Nutritionist.
- Some fitness professionals like personal trainers, sports team consultants, and physical therapists choose to get a certification like this in nutrition in order to broaden their range of services.

Holistic Nutritionist

Although some nutrition programs will cover whole foods and plant-based nutrition, a Certified Holistic Nutritionist makes those a primary focus. These professionals are trained in natural complementary nutrition to be able to coach, consult, and advise clients who want to pursue diet and lifestyle options aimed at optimizing health. The nutritional advice they give centers on foods that are complete and nutrient dense in their natural state. These foods are often organic, seasonal, and local whenever possible.

Education: Completion of a certification program, usually with the prerequisite of having a high school diploma, GED, or international equivalent. This is often done in six months or less. Reputable programs meet standards for accreditation from nationally recognized organizations such as the Naturopathic Medical Accreditation Board.

Where you could work: Self-employed as a nutritional consultant, community programs, schools, co-ops, farmers market associations, wellness spas, integrative medicine programs.



Job duties: The certification allows you to design an action plan for clients, assist with goal setting, promote behavior change and support efforts toward that shift, clarify the differences in popular diet plans like Paleo and vegan, and educate clients and groups about the value of whole foods and nutrient density.

“The nutritional advice they give centers on foods that are complete and nutrient dense in their natural state.”

Quick facts:

- Graduating from an accredited program will make you eligible to expand your credentials by applying to be a Board Certified Holistic Health Care Practitioner, Board Certified Nutritional Consultant, or Board Certified Holistic Nutritionist.
- Some professionals like acupuncturists, chiropractors, herbalists, and other alternative care practitioners choose to get a certification like this in order to broaden their range of services.
- There are also opportunities to pursue an advanced degree in holistic nutrition, such as a Master of Science in Nutrition and Integrative Health. Professionals who go that route, or gain a doctorate in holistic nutrition, are usually interested in teaching the subject, particularly at the college level.

Nutritionist

Of all the job titles out there, "nutritionist" seems to be the most confusing, but that's probably because it fails to describe the type of specifics that other titles in the profession have.

For example, a Certified Nutrition Consultant lets clients know that a nutrition professional has a certification and provides consulting services instead of treatment options. Similarly, a Holistic Nutritionist gives an indication of focus on whole foods that are nutrient dense in their natural state.

But a "nutritionist" doesn't have those designations, and in fact, anyone could feasibly call themselves that title without any coursework at all — seeing clients would be another matter, however, as laws are very specific regarding what type of certification standards you need to dispense nutrition advice. In some ways, it's like saying your company is "technology manufacturing" or "publishing" instead of communicating that you own Apple or The New York Times. Specifics matter.

In general, it's fine to use "nutritionist" as shorthand if you're chatting at a party or describing your work in general. But even then, using a more specific title like Registered Dietician or Certified Nutrition Consultant emphasizes your specialization and focus areas. That's especially important if you've decided to do a more focused certification like [sports nutritionist](#) or [weight management specialist](#).



What to Avoid



Job titles may seem interchangeable in many professions. An administrative assistant might be called an office support specialist, or a warehouse manager could be a logistics supervisor.

But when it comes to a field like nutrition, what you call yourself really matters. There are guidelines and requirements that vary from state to state, so it's crucial to know how you can present yourself, and what you can claim.

For example, in some states, there are limitations about which types of professionals can give nutrition advice. A fitness trainer in North Carolina can't talk about meal plans, while one in Minnesota can. Check out the [latest guidelines in your state](#) to get an understanding of the rules.



Also, be cautious when communicating health information in a way that implies treatment or diagnosis. If someone has food allergies that you want to address, that is usually allowed but only physicians should be offering an actual diagnosis. Stay away from terms like *prescribe*, *treat*, and *cure*.

Another caution: Don't make your job title fit a specific job opening unless you're sure that you have the educational clout to make that shift. Even then, check with the hiring manager to see if your qualifications match the duties.

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Finally, try to avoid ambiguity when it comes to your job title. As noted, "nutritionist" is not very helpful since it can encompass a range of areas, and doesn't provide the specifics about education and focus that clients would want. "Nutrition Coach" is slightly better, but it still doesn't emphasize the credibility you get from being registered or certified — powerful terms to highlight when sharing your job title.

Taking the Step



No matter what educational track you choose, you'll find yourself with abundant opportunity as people continue to focus on their health and wellness. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, job openings for nutrition professionals are expected to increase by 21 percent between 2012 and 2022.

Remember that you won't just be helping others to pick one type of food over another, you'll be making a difference in clients' lives. Because nutrition has such a ripple effect across all aspects of health, your insights can help people in every way — emotionally, physically, and mentally. Guiding clients and helping them navigate toward better health can be a hugely satisfying career choice.

To learn more about certifications, including specifics on coursework, visit that [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.

Share your passion for a topic that touches every life, every day. As health and wellness continue to be top of mind for so many people, you can be part of the shift toward empowerment and insight, by becoming an advocate for better health and a knowledgeable nutrition professional.

LEARN ABOUT AFPA'S NUTRITION CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

