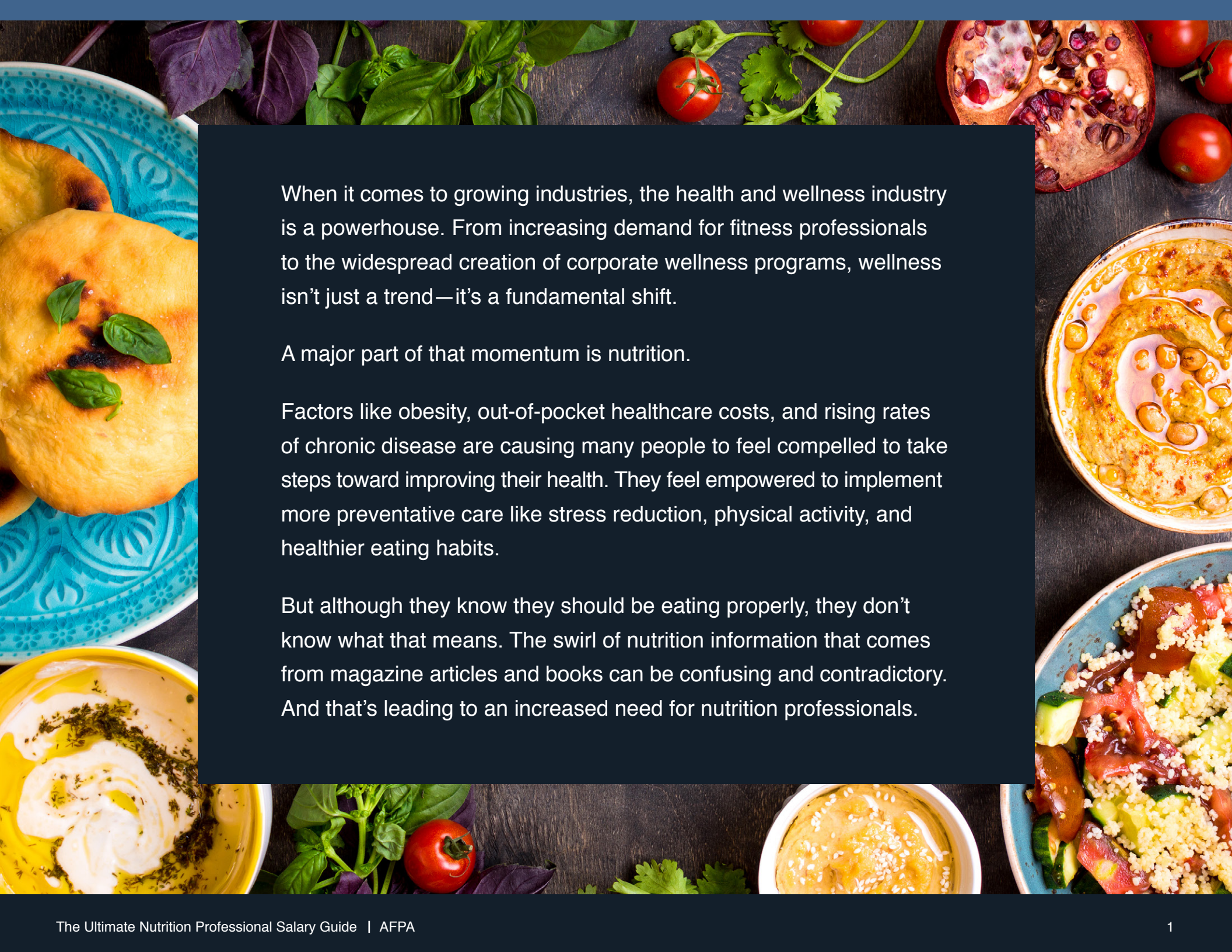




# The Ultimate Nutrition Professional Salary Guide

Learn how much you can make as a nutrition professional



A collage of fresh ingredients and dishes. At the top, there are purple and green basil leaves, a red tomato, and a pomegranate. Below these are several bowls of food: a blue bowl with a golden-brown flatbread topped with basil, a white bowl of hummus with olive oil, a blue bowl of quinoa salad with tomatoes and cucumbers, and a white bowl of hummus with sesame seeds. The background is a dark wooden surface.

When it comes to growing industries, the health and wellness industry is a powerhouse. From increasing demand for fitness professionals to the widespread creation of corporate wellness programs, wellness isn't just a trend—it's a fundamental shift.

A major part of that momentum is nutrition.

Factors like obesity, out-of-pocket healthcare costs, and rising rates of chronic disease are causing many people to feel compelled to take steps toward improving their health. They feel empowered to implement more preventative care like stress reduction, physical activity, and healthier eating habits.

But although they know they should be eating properly, they don't know what that means. The swirl of nutrition information that comes from magazine articles and books can be confusing and contradictory. And that's leading to an increased need for nutrition professionals.



As one of these experts, you can help clients navigate the challenge that comes with meal planning, individualized nutrition needs, everyday food choices, and pairing nutrition with fitness. 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.

Not only does that provide job security, but it also gives you enormous flexibility when it comes to tailoring your career.

In this guide, we'll take a look at what kind of salary ranges you can expect as a nutrition professional, and we'll delve into the factors that might determine your income. No matter what you choose, nutrition is an exciting, growing field that is rich with earning possibilities.

**Let's get started!**





# Top Salary Factors

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the national median salary for nutrition professionals is about \$58,000, with top pay coming in at more than \$80,000. But earning potential can vary greatly, especially if you use your skills and insight for both salaried and non-salaried opportunities.

Before exploring specific salary ranges for typical nutrition careers (look for that info in the next section), it's important to note that income tends to fluctuate based on a number of factors:

## Location

A nutrition professional at an elite spa in New York City and a sports nutritionist in Kansas City simply won't make the same salary. Like every other profession, location will be an element in your salary negotiations.

Keeping location in mind when setting salary expectations is crucial when you're evaluating opportunities, particularly if you're considering relocation to a new area. Not all nutrition positions will be staff jobs, but looking at those types of employment ads should give you an idea of salary ranges, and that can be helpful in setting rates as a consultant. Keep in mind that this is relevant for full-time salaried positions and local opportunities. Some nutritionists see clients online, and therefore location might not even play a role in their annual income, as long as they can attract enough clients.

“Like every other profession, location will be an element in your salary negotiations.”



## Education

Having an interest in nutrition is obviously vital, but you'll also be considered for a much higher salary if you have the knowledge to go with your passion.

Education not only gives you the information you need to communicate nutrition topics effectively, but also proves to employers and clients that you have the background and foundation to provide insights on nutrition topics with confidence.

Many employers won't even consider you for a nutrition professional position without some type of credential. When it comes to nutrition education, you have two main tracks you can follow. 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.

A degree offers potentially more opportunities in the field, including working at hospitals and healthcare systems. But it takes four years for a bachelor's—plus at least two more for a master's and a minimum of two more for a doctorate—and requires standard college tuition fees, which can be tens of thousands of dollars for each year of education.







### **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.

Some positions will be unattainable without a college degree—particularly those in research and certain healthcare settings—but the opportunities are often still abundant with a certification. Also, a program usually takes about six months and is much more affordable than a college degree, getting you into the field faster and with less investment than a formal education.

## Experience

Like other professions, your background can determine whether or not you're in a higher salary bracket than others who are just starting out in the field. Even if you've just earned a certification, your salary could be slightly higher if you've worked in the health and wellness industry in some capacity for at least a few years.

For example, you might be a personal trainer who's adding nutrition insights to your services. That would mean you already have a client roster and a solid salary or compensation base, and you're adding to it with nutrition expertise. That would differ from someone who's just coming into the field and has to build up a client base.

Also, keep in mind that many types of experience can play into a career as a nutrition professional. For example, you might have past employment in marketing, sales, financial management, or customer service. As a nutrition professional, you'll need skills in these areas to grow your business or client base.

When considering how to increase your salary, take a moment to review your skill set and previous experience and see how they might be utilized for your nutrition business. When you do, it's possible that you could negotiate your way into a higher starting salary.

“Also keep in mind that many types of experience can play into a career as a nutrition professional.”



## Specialization

Often taken on after a certification is in place, an area of specialization can set you apart from other nutrition professionals, especially in locations where a specialty would be particularly useful. Some examples are:



### Weight Management Consultant:

If you pursue a certification directly related to weight management as a specialization, you would be able to work in settings where that's the focus of service. For example, wellness spas, weight management programs, hospitals, and some larger gym franchises employ this type of consultant for clients who have weight loss as a primary focus. There are also some facilities that help those with eating disorders, and a weight management consultant would work with those clients on a healthier emotional and physical approach to food.



### Sports Nutritionist:

With a certification on sports-related topics, you can work in a variety of settings, including consulting a professional or semi-professional team or seeing clients at a gym or fitness center. Sports nutritionists are also in high demand at some rehabilitation centers so that physical therapy and occupational therapy can be supported by proper nutritional techniques. Some sports nutritionists also work as independent consultants and offer their services to individual professional and amateur athletes who want to enhance their performance.

## Commitment

There's a reason that job interviews exist, rather than hiring done by resume alone. An employer wants to see that you're dedicated to the field, that you have the personality and motivation to succeed, and that you're serious about helping clients achieve their goals.

A certification can go a long way toward ensuring this level of confidence in your abilities, and so can a commitment to ongoing education. Nutrition is a continually changing field—that's what makes it so exciting to many people—and you need to be able to show you're ready to keep learning as a way to stay fresh and informed.

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A professional who obtained a certification 10 years ago and then never bothered to renew any education since then will likely be passed over for a job opportunity compared to a candidate who emphasizes a love for ongoing learning about the field and its fast-moving research.

With those factors in mind, we can take a closer look at what some typical career options look like for nutrition professionals—and what your salary might be if you choose one of them.





# Career Opportunities

Keeping in mind that salaries can vary based on factors like location and experience, the nutrition field can definitely give you a solid and even lucrative career while doing something that you love. Here are some typical career opportunities you may want to consider:



## **Independent Nutrition Professional**

**Typical salary range: \$35,000 to \$125,000**

Some nutrition professionals do very well by acting as independent contractors, which means they establish their own consulting business and then train clients in multiple settings. For example, they might meet clients in their homes or in other places like hospitals, physical therapy centers, or even a local coffee shop.

Unlike fitness trainers, who often have to demonstrate proper technique in person, nutrition consultants can communicate their insights over the phone or online. That means you may have clients across the country, and you help them through phone counseling, online food journals, and customized plans sent by email.

There's enormous appeal in doing independent consulting, because you can often set your own hours, be your own boss, and earn more income based on how aggressively you market your services. However, this option may not be ideal for those who want a more established income that doesn't vary much month to month. But if you can handle some income uncertainty and like the challenge of being creative with your time and marketing smarts, this could be a great choice.

As you'll see, the salary range is extremely broad. That's because an independent professional's income will depend largely on factors like client loyalty, marketing success, and hours spent with clients. Some professionals might work 60 to 70 hours on the business—putting together social media campaigns that bring in more clients, creating online workshops, developing basic meal plans that can be sent to clients—and their income will rise as a result.







## Corporate Nutritional Consultant

**Typical salary range: \$40,000 to \$60,000**

Companies are realizing that healthy employees are more productive, efficient, and collaborative. That's led to big steps forward in implementing employee health and wellness plans.

At larger companies, they're going one step further by employing nutritional consultants on a contract or full-time basis for duties like consulting with employees individually, leading workshops on better health strategies, developing meal options for employee cafeterias, and spearheading healthy-food initiatives.

“Companies are realizing that healthy employees are more productive, efficient, and collaborative.”

This has led to huge opportunities for nutrition professionals, particularly those who work with several companies simultaneously. In some areas, it may take more effort and marketing initiatives to convince corporate executives to implement nutrition into their wellness mix, but fortunately, there's a great deal of research about the benefits of a healthy workforce. Tapping into this trend could bring long-term work and higher salaries for those who choose this as an area of specialization.



## Weight Management Professional

**Salary range: \$35,000 to \$75,000**

Many people become interested in changing their diets because they feel the need to lose weight, but they've often become so entrenched in bad eating habits that they need advice on how to start a new food lifestyle—and especially how to maintain it for life.

That's led to a surge in opportunities for nutrition professionals who can turn research data and cutting-edge insights into workable action plans for clients. Employment settings might include formal weight management programs, healthcare offices, fitness centers, rehab facilities, and wellness spas.

There's also an opportunity to add this to other education efforts. For example, a personal trainer who notices that the majority of his or her clients are struggling with weight may want to add this specialization in order to create a more rounded complement of services.







## Nutrition Program Developer

**Typical salary range: \$35,000 to \$70,000**

Being able to design a nutrition program for both individuals and groups is a distinctive skill that's welcomed in many settings, from fitness facilities to resorts to rehab centers.

A program developer doesn't just set meal plans—although that's often part of the role—but also sees the larger benefits of a program and can articulate its advantages.

For example, a professional may be working in a senior-care setting and will create several nutrition programs that are tailored to the needs of those clients, such as developing a heart-healthy diet, a weight-loss diet, and a diabetes-control diet.

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These positions are sometimes done on a contract basis, which creates a more variable salary range. Either way, being able to create programs that address the health needs of several clients at once is often a very satisfying track for many nutrition professionals.



## Nutrition Educator

**Typical salary range: \$25,000 to \$35,000**

Although every nutrition consultation session involves education, there's also the opportunity to take on a larger role when it comes to developing material that reaches a wider audience. For example, you might put together class series that are taught at community centers, spas, fitness centers, or schools. You can also develop one-day workshops on specific topics like weight loss, sports performance, plant-based eating, or senior nutrition.

The skills you learned during a certification program about marketing, communication, and business strategy are used to great effect in this role. Income can be steady if you have a salaried position at a place like a school or fitness center, but often, professionals incorporate nutrition education into a broader suite of services.

For instance, they may take clients online and in person during the day and hold workshops and classes during evenings and weekends. So, although the salary range for this position may seem on the lower side, keep in mind that it's often supplementing other work, and so it would be on top of a regular salary or independent contractor income.

As you may have noticed, the salary ranges for all of these opportunities can be broad, but that's often because your skills put you in a unique position to earn more based on your efforts—taking on more individual clients, developing workshops, and leading marketing campaigns can all bump you into the higher end of these ranges and even beyond.





# Launching Your Career

Although many people might think that nutrition professionals only take on patients in a hospital setting—which can be a satisfying career option in and of itself—there are many more options available these days.

Because of the huge boom in wellness, these professionals are highly sought-after, especially if they have the credentials and knowledge necessary to earn higher salaries. Not only can you work in multiple settings as a nutrition professional, but you can also pursue additional specialty certifications that allow you to address the needs of certain populations, like competitive athletes or those trying to lose weight.

In addition to helping individual clients in person, you can lead classes and workshops; do online consultations; team with fitness professionals for tailored programs; and develop programs for spas, schools, rehab centers, and more.

With every opportunity comes new income potential, increasing your annual salary along the way. To learn more about certifications that could put you on a nutrition professional career path, [visit the website](#) for American Fitness Professionals & Associates (AFPA).





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## About AFPA

AFPA offers more than 20 different personal fitness trainer, group fitness instructor, nutritionist, weight loss, senior fitness, youth fitness, yoga instructor, and Pilates instructor certification programs online or through distance education that are nationally and internationally recognized. In addition, AFPA offers many specialty credentials in medical wellness and more than 200 continuing education courses to keep you on the cutting edge of what's happening in the industry.

The AFPA nutrition course curriculum fully meets the [American Association of Drugless Practitioners \(AADP\)](#) board educational requirements, giving AFPA students a thorough knowledge of courses set forth by the association, and makes them eligible to become a professional member of AADP.

The AFPA nutrition course curriculum also fully meets the [American Naturopathic Medical Accreditation Board \(ANMAB\)](#) educational requirements. Graduates of AFPA are eligible to apply to be a board-certified holistic nutritionist.

AFPA is a registered educational institution with the [Canadian Association of Drugless Practitioners](#) as well as a partner in wellness and organizational member of the [American Holistic Health Association](#).