

Registration and Licensure of Nutrition Professionals in Florida¹

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Consumers need to know who is qualified to practice nutrition or dietetics before seeking nutrition advice. Dietetics is a specialized field that allows persons completing their studies to take a national registration examination in order to become a registered dietitian (RD), also known as a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN). The RDN designation emphasizes the fact that RDs (dietitians) are also nutritionists, based on their rigorous credentialing requirements. RD is a well-recognized credential that is protected from use by unqualified practitioners. As its use increases among dietitians, RDN will become more widely recognized as a credential that represents dietetics professionals. The Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) establishes and enforces the standards for dietetic registration and issues the RD/RDN credential to those who are qualified.

Self-styled nutritionists without proper credentials who provide nutrition counseling to those willing to pay for it place their clients at risk for adverse health effects. The public deserves to be protected from these unqualified nutrition practitioners. Registration and licensure of nutrition professionals exist to protect the public from people who are not qualified to practice as nutrition or dietetics professionals, just as licensure of physicians protects the public from people who are not qualified to practice medicine.

The following is information about dietetic registration (a national credential) and licensure (a state-specific license). Forty-six states have their own form of licensure

or credentialing for nutrition professionals (<http://www.cdrnet.org/state-licensure>). In the state of Florida, there are three credentials that allow people to legally practice as a nutrition or dietetics professional: the national credential, registered dietitian or registered dietitian nutritionist (RD or RDN), and the state credentials, licensed dietitian/nutritionist (LD/N) and licensed nutrition counselor (LNC). RD/RDNs also need to be licensed in Florida if they are in private practice or work in public health in the state.



Figure 1. In Florida, a registered dietitian or registered dietitian nutritionist (RD or RDN), licensed dietitian/nutritionist (LD/N), and licensed nutrition counselor (LNC) may provide nutrition counseling. Nutrition professionals working in private practice or public health in Florida must be licensed by the state to practice nutrition counseling. Credits: M_a_y_a/istockphoto.com

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Registered Dietitian (RD) and Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN)

RDs/RDNs complete a required program of courses accredited by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND). They must earn at least a bachelor's degree and complete a minimum of 1,200 hours of supervised practice before qualifying to take the RD exam. Once they pass the exam and earn the RD/RDN credential, registered dietitians must earn at least 75 hours of continuing professional education (CPE) every five years, according to an established learning plan, which they submit to CDR for approval. Developing a learning plan and completing the CPE units that support the plan ensures the dietitian's continued expertise in nutrition (<http://www.cdrnet.org/pdp/professional-development-portfolio-guide>). Continuing education moves dietetics professionals beyond the entry-level knowledge and skills that were needed to pass the national registration exam. It ensures that dietetics and nutrition professionals engage in a program of lifelong learning to remain competent in their field of practice. **The ever-changing nature of the field of nutrition makes this CPE requirement critical.**



Figure 2. Continuing education requirements ensure that RD/RDNs who counsel patients will be up-to-date in their field. In Florida, continuing education also is required for LD/Ns and LNCs. Credits: kasto80/istockphoto.com

Licensed Dietitian/Nutritionist (LD/N)

State licensing laws are statutes that explicitly define scopes of practice for professions. These laws protect the public by ensuring that only persons qualified in a particular field are allowed to practice in that field. Where such a law exists, it is illegal to perform as a professional in that field without first obtaining the appropriate license from the state.

Florida enacted its licensure law for the practice of nutrition and dietetics in 1988. According to Florida's licensure law:

§468.502 “The Legislature finds that the practice of dietetics and nutrition or nutrition counseling by unskilled and incompetent practitioners presents a danger to the public health and safety.”

§468.504 “No person may engage for remuneration in dietetics and nutrition practice or nutrition counseling or hold himself or herself out as a practitioner of dietetics and nutrition practice or nutrition counseling unless the person is licensed in accordance with the provisions of this part.”

There are exceptions to this rule, including certain licensed health professionals and cooperative Extension home economists (family and consumer sciences agents). See §468.505 of the statute: http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=0400-0499/0468/Sections/0468.505.html.

Eligibility requirements for licensed dietitian/nutritionists in the state of Florida are described on the Florida Department of Health website:

Eligibility Requirements

- “Possession of at least a bachelor's degree with a major course of study in human nutrition, food and nutrition, dietetics, or food management as outlined in sections 468.509, F.S., and 64B8-42.002, F.A.C.”
- “Successful completion of 900 hours of pre-professional planned and continuous supervised practice in dietetics or nutrition, as described in subsection 64B8-42.002(3), F.A.C.”
- “Successful passage of the dietitian exam offered by the Commission on Dietetic Registration.”

Licensed dietitian/nutritionists in Florida should use the designation LD/N. They may use the terms dietitian, licensed dietitian, nutritionist, or licensed nutritionist, in connection with their name or place of business to indicate that they are licensed in Florida.

As described above, LD/Ns must meet academic and pre-professional practice criteria similar to those for RDs before they can take the state licensure examination, which in Florida is the Registration Examination for Dietitians administered by CDR. In addition, all licensed practitioners must complete at least 30 hours of continuing education within the 24-month period prior to the biennial renewal of their license. This is critical to ensure that the public will

receive up-to-date and accurate information when they seek the services of an LD/N.

Section 456.013(7), Florida Statutes, mandates the completion of a 2-hour course relating to prevention of medical errors as part of the licensure and renewal process. Courses approved by any Board within the Division of Medical Quality Assurance of the Department of Health pursuant to Section 456.013(7), F.S., are recommended by the Council and approved by the Board. For additional information see 64B8–42.005, F.A.C. You may search for continuing education courses using the Department of Health’s continuing education tracking database: www.CEBroker.com (Florida Department of Health, n.d.).

Licensed Nutrition Counselor (LNC)

When the licensure law was enacted in Florida, individuals who had been practicing nutrition counseling prior to 1988 were allowed to apply for the designation licensed nutrition counselor (LNC) during the period from July 1, 1988, to March 30, 1997. To indicate that they are licensed in Florida, LNCs may use the terms nutrition counselor, licensed nutrition counselor, nutritionist, or licensed nutritionist in connection with their names or places of business.

No law regulated the practice of nutrition counseling before 1988, so practitioners who were grandfathered in as LNCs when licensure was enacted could have been highly qualified or completely unqualified in the field. Individuals who choose to seek out the services of an LNC will need to learn about his or her educational background and training to determine whether or not the person is qualified to practice. Regardless of their background, LNCs must earn continuing education units so they can maintain their licenses to practice nutrition counseling legally in Florida.

Additional information about dietetics and nutrition licensure in Florida may be obtained from:

The Florida Department of Health
Dietetics and Nutrition Practice Council
4052 Bald Cypress Way—Bin C-05
Tallahassee, FL 32399-3255
Telephone: (850) 414-6860

Website: <http://www.floridahealth.gov/licensing-and-regulation/dietetic-nutrition/index.html>

For information about RD/RDN registration, contact the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR): <https://admin.cdrnet.org/vault/2459/web/files/PDP%20Guide%202015.pdf>

References

Florida Department of Health. (n.d.). Licensing. Florida Health. Accessed June 22, 2016. <http://www.floridahealth.gov/licensing-and-regulation/dietetic-nutrition/licensing/index.html>

FLA. STAT. §§468.502, .504 (2016).