

Separating Nutrition Fact from Fiction

Marianne Carter, MS, RD, CHES

If you need to remodel your kitchen, you bring in an experienced contractor. When your car breaks down, you take it to a trained mechanic. We rely on qualified and licensed professionals. There's a degree of specialization and training in most disciplines; that's especially true in healthcare. Orthopedic surgeons aren't going to treat a heart condition, nor would a chiropractor remove a brain tumor. Specific education, training and skill sets are needed.

Sadly, there are individuals trying to cash in on the booming wellness industry by holding themselves out to be nutrition experts, despite limited knowledge or experience in the field. Fortunately, in Delaware, there's an easy way to discern who is qualified – check to see if that individual is licensed as a dietitian/nutritionist (LDN) by the state.

In order to obtain a license in Delaware, the state requires that an applicant possess a minimum of a baccalaureate degree from an accredited college or university with a major course of study in a nutrition-focused area. In addition, the applicant must have completed a supervised internship program of no less than 900 hours, successfully passed a national exam, and be current with continuing education requirements.

Nutrition impacts so many aspects of our health - blood pressure, cholesterol, digestion, cancer risk, etc. It's a science requiring a command of anatomy and physiology, biochemistry, food science, behavior modification, etc. It's also an evolving science; recommendations change as the scientific evidence is accumulated. Trained nutrition experts are able to separate facts from fads and translate nutritional science into information that consumers can use.

Being qualified to dole out nutrition advice requires more knowledge and skills than simply having personal experience with weight loss or sporting a body with six-pack abs. Qualified nutritionists base their advice on a host of factors, such as the person's past medical history, diagnoses, lab results, food allergies/intolerances and current medications.

In addition, before providing recommendations, they'll obtain detailed information about food preferences, supplement use, diet history, access to food, budget and cultural preferences.

Providing dietary advice may seem to some to be a benign act. Several states, however, have documented cases of unqualified individuals giving improper nutritional advice, which has resulted in harm and even death. Consumers are in desperate need of nutrition education. When medical nutrition therapy is needed - an approach to treating medical conditions like diabetes, hypertension and obesity through the use of a specific diet - it's important to ensure that the "nutritionist" you refer patients/clients to is licensed.

Licensure protects the public health by establishing minimum educational and experience criteria for those individuals who hold themselves out to be experts in nutrition. To determine if someone is licensed, go to the Delaware Division of Professional Regulation's website and search under dietitians/nutritionists.

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