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Opportunity's Knocking — Your Best Career in Dietetics Awaits
By Maggie Moon, MS, RD
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Whether you're new to the field or firmly planted in your practice, you may wonder what else is out there—it's OK to be curious! Take our quiz, see how you rate, and get inspired by RDs who have found their ideal jobs.

Are you job curious? If you're like most RDs, there are about as many areas of nutrition that spark your interest as there are new products that hit grocery store shelves each year. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average American will have about 11 jobs before they reach the age of 42. So if you haven't already had a handful of different jobs in nutrition, chances are they may be in your future.

The years of academic and practical training we all go through mean we have the expertise to make a variety of jobs in dietetics viable, though some may be a better fit for us than others. As nutrition professionals, we have a "nice problem": We work in a growth industry that offers diverse ways to work toward the same goal of helping people eat right.

Whether you're fresh out of your dietetic internship, a few years into your first job, or a seasoned professional, you may be ready for something new—or perhaps just curious. Take the following completely unscientific (p > 5) quiz to determine which sort of career may suit you and read about how some of our colleagues are living their dream.

Career Quiz

1. You're hosting a dinner party. You're most likely to:

- a. prepare longtime favorites you can trust will come out just the way you like them.
- b. strategically place finger foods and cocktails to get the conversation flowing.
- c. peruse the farmers' market the day of the event to grab what's fresh and let it inspire the spread.
- d. ask guests to bring their favorite foods, come up with a menu on the spot, and engage everyone in group meal prep.

2. It's a workday. You're most likely to start your day with:

- a. the breakfast you planned out the previous night.
- b. coffee or tea and a small bite.
- c. yoga or blogging.
- d. whatever you feel like.

3. When you started college, you:

- a. had your top three choices of dietetic internship programs scoped out.
- b. went to campus mixers to meet people who could help you and those you could help.
- c. joined a handful of clubs and had a crush on your smartest teaching assistant.
- d. founded a club and recruited members.

4. If you were a Microsoft Office program, you'd be:

- a. Excel.
- b. Outlook.
- c. Word.
- d. PowerPoint.

5. Your idea of a dream vacation is:

- a. a week in the Bahamas at an all-inclusive resort.
- b. joining an organized group trip biking across the Italian-French border.
- c. a "stay-cation" during which you finally cross off some local hot spots you've neglected to visit.
- d. finding a last-minute trip to Amsterdam and figuring out a place to stay once you've landed.

6. You have an important deadline coming up and you want to turn in your best work. Your first step is to:

- a. research what others have done in the past.

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- b. gather the smartest people you know to brainstorm.
- c. start the process solo, culling down the list of great ideas you have at your fingertips.
- d. get started right away by yourself or with a team.

7. You see an abandoned mailman's bag full of mail on the sidewalk near your home. Your first thought is to:

- a. trust that the postman will return shortly and head home as planned.
- b. head home and call the post office and the police to alert them.
- c. scope out neighbors' mailboxes and knock on doors to determine where the mailman was last.
- d. look inside the bag for the mailman's identification information.

8. Your best feature is your:

- a. hair.
- b. smile.
- c. mind.
- d. hands.

9. If you were on a desert island and were allowed one magazine, it'd be:

- a. *Real Simple*.
- b. *The Economist*.
- c. *The New Yorker*.
- d. *Food & Wine*.

10. If you were a winter Olympics event, you'd be:

- a. cross-country skiing.
- b. speed skating.
- c. figure skating.
- d. snowboarding.

How You Score

For every "a" answer, give yourself 1 point. For every "b" answer, 2 points. For every "c" answer, 3 points. For every "d" answer, 4 points. Add up your points and match your total score to one of the four following categories.

10 to 14 points: You're a Steady Betty (or Bob)

Top five characteristics: responsible, organized, structured, perceptive, dependable
In the workplace, you are perceptive and sensitive to how others are feeling and thrive on bringing structure and order to your world. Your great observational skills help you determine what people want or need. Your talent for organization helps you develop structured plans to help people reach their goals.

You may prefer stability over change and tend to be even-keeled. Being prepared and comfortable with your day-to-day tasks may contribute to your feeling of job satisfaction, and you may enjoy working in a setting that values your dependability and thoughtfulness.

If this sounds like you, you may be a great clinical dietitian, community nutritionist, or private in-person or telehealth counselor. It may be surprising to hear that the skills and temperament previously described may also come into play for a culinary RD working in an upscale Manhattan restaurant.

For Natalia Hancock, ACA, RD, culinary nutritionist for Rouge Tomato Restaurant in New York City, it's important to listen to customers and respond to their feedback, needs, and wants. And though she admits she is "always prepared for last-minute requests and meetings and it helps to be flexible," she still manages to take an impressively structured approach to her day.

Hancock shares what a day is like for her: She arrives at the Rouge Tomato office around 9:30 am and checks e-mails, greets everyone in her office, and reviews the day's events with her interns. Then she heads downstairs to the kitchen and "pokes around to see what is going on in the kitchen with the chefs." Then she works at her desk either on material for articles, updating the nutritional charter, or analyzing a new dish from one of the chefs.

Her afternoon lunch is a working affair; she usually sits with a guest she has invited to introduce Rouge Tomato and its health philosophy. (She also trains the staff to discuss the restaurant's health philosophy with customers.) Over three courses, she jots down feedback for the chefs. After lunch, Hancock typically catches up with her inbox and e-mails the feedback from lunch to the chefs. Despite the natural ebb and flow of restaurant life—or perhaps because of it—she manages to create an organized framework for her day and loves what she does.

15 to 24 points: You're a Strategy Maven

Top five characteristics: strategic, future oriented, visionary, dislikes routine, has natural leadership abilities

One of your professional strengths is that you can take in complex information and synthesize it to come up with theory-based yet practical and long-term solutions. In both your personal and professional realms, you enjoy being social, which makes you a natural networker and team leader. While you are part social butterfly/networker, you also need alone time to process information and develop those big-picture

solutions. Your talent for thinking strategically applies to the work at hand and the arc of your career. You have no trouble seeing the possibilities down the road.

Your ideal work environment may be one that allows you freedom in your daily activities. You may make a great business owner, manager, supermarket RD, or consultant.

"Working in business and industry requires great communication skills and project management skills," says Annette Maggi, MS, RD, LD, FADA, senior director of nutrition at NuVal LLC in Braintree, Mass. She offers a few more tips for strategic, business-minded RDs: "You have to have fine-tuned experience in selling your concepts to business partners, be flexible, and be willing to play the politics game that exists in corporate America."

With a background in business consulting, Christen C. Cooper, MS, RD, who runs Cooper Nutrition Education & Communications in Pleasantville, N.Y., agrees that "knowledge of business and politics are huge boons to success in our profession, business in particular."

Cooper's must-have skills include the ability to read and write quickly and to analyze and prioritize tasks and information. She admits that she thinks she's a "right-brained person in a left-brain-dominated occupation." As an "out-of-the-box thinker," she says, "this hasn't served me well in all environments. But as a consultant, it's a huge plus because nutrition crosses over into so many fields that seeing the 'big picture' in a creative way can differentiate you in the market."

25 to 34 points: You're a Jack (or Jill) of All Trades

Top five characteristics: Project oriented, creative, broadly capable, excellent communication skills, independent

Your professional golden ticket is that you are multifaceted, multitalented, and generally good at whatever interests you. Your level of engagement in a project tends to be directly linked to how much it captures your interest, which works out well when you're very passionate about a project. (Read: Take caution before accepting projects that may not keep your fire burning.)

You also bring to the table a high degree of creativity, and some may even describe you as an artist at heart. You're self-reliant and independent, so although you enjoy working with others, you may prefer to work alone. Your ideal work environment provides the personal freedom and space for your creativity and problem-solving skills to do their magic. Conversely, you may dislike detail-oriented work or structured work environments.

Your project-oriented, independent working style plus your wide range of capabilities mean you have a lot of options. You may enjoy writing projects (eg, articles, blogs, books), developing recipes, or perhaps juggling 17 different project-based consultancy gigs.

Every blog post is a new adventure for Jenna A. Bell, PhD, RD, CSSD, blogger for Chicagonow.com/["Eat Right Around Chicago."](http://EatRightAroundChicago.com/) Armed with a laptop, a camera, and an empty stomach, she explores how a dietitian with a great appetite can eat well around the city. Bell shares that developing blog posts requires creativity, humor, quick wit, and motivation. "I also have to be opinionated and find inspiration in a variety of nutrition topics to talk about," she says.

Cynthia Sass, MPH, MA, RD, CSSD, who is based in New York City, has no fewer than five major projects in her life at any given moment. She runs her own consulting company (Sass Consulting Services, Inc), sees clients in a private practice, is a contributing editor and weight loss coach columnist for *Shape*, is a "food coach" to ABC News, and is a sports nutritionist for the Philadelphia Phillies and Tampa Bay Rays.

"I would say it's 50% nutrition related and 50% creativity, communication, and organization," says Sass. "In my experience, one of the most important skills in my day-to-day work is the ability to translate nutrition science into easy-to-understand, consumer-friendly terms."

"Whether it's with nurses or doctors, patients or family members, PR firms or journalists ... if you can't communicate and connect, you can't do anything," says D. Milton Stokes, MPH, RD, CDN, owner of One Source Nutrition LLC, a nutrition counseling and consulting firm in Connecticut.

Stokes connects the dots. "No doctor will honor your TPN [total parenteral nutrition] recommendations if you can't communicate a rationale, and your boss won't give you a raise if you can't prove the justification," he says. Stokes also juggles being a media consultant, freelance writer (who recently came out with the *Flat Belly Diet! for Men*), and per diem clinical dietitian, all while working toward his doctoral degree in health communication.

"For my work, I must have solid skills in recipe development and analysis, writing, public speaking/media training, and a strong understanding about food," says Dana Angelo White, MS, RD, ATC, who runs Dana White Nutrition, Inc in South Norwalk, Conn. She's also a sports nutrition consultant, certified athletic trainer, and culinary

dietitian for the Food Network's "Healthy Eats" blog. She adds to her list of must-haves confidence, creativity, the ability to accept constructive criticism, and a sense of humor.

When asked about their "typical day," these Jacks and Jills responded (predictably) to the effect of "never heard of it." The type of work understandably varies day to day—from researching, writing, speaking, seeing clients, and developing or testing recipes to doing TV interviews.

35 to 40 points: "Action" Is Your Middle Name

Top five characteristics: entrepreneurial, self-motivated, hands-on, passionate, ambitious

Your work is an extension of your values, and you wouldn't have it any other way despite the ups and downs. Your passion drives your professional choices, and you do what you love. Your ambition and charisma extend to your colleagues, and you enjoy mentoring others.

Because you're action oriented, you prefer practical tactics over theory. You're also highly creative, which makes you an asset when brainstorming. Not surprisingly, you learn best with hands-on training. Your best working environment gives you the freedom you need to do things your way.

For Ellie Krieger, MS, RD, *New York Times* best-selling author of *So Easy* and host of the Food Network's *Healthy Appetite*, being in the kitchen was always going to be a part of her career. She enjoyed exploring farmers' markets and being in the kitchen throughout college and loved exploring international cuisines, all from a personal interest that was eventually complemented with culinary school coursework at The Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y.

"If you want to learn how to cook, get in the kitchen," she advises. "Formal culinary training is valuable but even that means little if you're not getting regular hands-on practice in the kitchen."

Krieger also knew she wanted to reach people through the media, whether that meant writing, radio, or TV. She did the legwork and found her way into internships at CNN and a local CBS station. "Internships are critical," she says. She also interned with great mentors: Carolyn O'Neil, MS, RD, and Liz Weiss, MS, RD. "I said to myself, 'There's never going to be a New York Times wanted ad for the kind of work I really want,' so I made my own way into the industry."

Round Hole, Square Peg

Don't be discouraged if no single category describes you perfectly or if you find you are a composite of qualities described in more than one category. The consensus from colleagues in the field who love what they do seems to be that the ideal job is one in which your professional interests, preferred working environment, and skill sets all align. Notably, if it's just the latter that is lacking, there are options for getting up to speed through classes, internships, and work experience.

Get Inspired

Read on to gain inspiration from a selection of responses to the question, "Why do you do what you do?"

"I love taking my nutrition knowledge and breaking it down for real life. I find it exciting to bust myths, solve diet problems, and give advice that people can easily apply to their day-to-day life. I also love to eat, judge restaurants, and talk about them. I like any opportunity to express thoughts that make me laugh—I have a constant stream of jokes going through my head, and this provides me an outlet. Lastly, I have other jobs—and I do them from home—so this blogging gig gets me showered and out of the house to eat right around Chicago!"

— Jenna A. Bell, PhD, RD, CSSD, blogger for *Chicagonow.com*/ "Eat Right Around Chicago"

"I don't think of what I do as a job. I really love this profession, and nearly everything I work on feels like a passion project!"

— Cynthia Sass, MPH, MA, RD, CSSD, owner of *Sass Consulting Services, Inc* in New York City

"I really love my job at Rouge Tomate. I get to use so many different skill sets and am so proud to be working with such talented and devoted individuals. I am able to promote the message of eating healthy from this position to people who really want to hear it. I am challenged every day. I am thrilled that nutrition and sustainability are part of such a chic and upscale restaurant. I feel good about collaborating with our chefs and creating healthy, well-balanced, nutrient-dense cuisine. It is a message that our country needs to hear."

— Natalia Hancock, ACA, RD, culinary nutritionist for *Rouge Tomate Restaurant* in New York City

"Love it! The variety makes me crave more. Writing, teaching, advising undergraduates, working with patients—I get to do it all. If I am unhappy, I change my schedule or I create new projects. I do what I want to do. Having my RD opens many, many doors."

— D. Milton Stokes, MPH, RD, CDN, owner of *One Source Nutrition LLC* in Connecticut

"I love my job because I work for myself. I set my own prices and I do my work my way. This autonomy doesn't appeal to everyone. But for entrepreneurs and those who just must 'do their own thing,' it's ideal. There are no guarantees of money or success, but what you do you earn for yourself. You can feel especially good about your successes."

— *Christen C. Cooper, MS, RD, creator of Cooper Nutrition Education & Communications in Pleasantville, N.Y.*

"This is the job that is most aligned with my skills and talents. It's amazing to be a part of a start-up and have the opportunity to help shape our business and company."

— *Annette Maggi, MS, RD, LD, FADA, senior director of nutrition at NuVal LLC in Braintree, Mass.*

"Getting to speak to people who'd read my book and tried the recipes inspired me to get back into my test kitchen and start another book. I really feel like I know who I'm writing these books for."

— *Ellie Krieger, MS, RD, New York Times best-selling author of So Easy and host of the Food Network's **Healthy Appetite***

"I'm passionate about food and cuisine. I'm passionate about nutrition and health. I'm passionate about our environment and the climate. I firmly believe that if you have sincere passion for something, it will carry you farther than any other single trait. In fact, I truly don't consider all that I do to fit under the category 'job.' I'm on a career adventure. I love what I do for a living. It's a part of who I am ... not just something I do for a certain number of hours."

— *Jackie Newgent, RD, CDN, culinary nutritionist, chef instructor, spokesperson, and author based in New York City*

— *Maggie Moon, MS, RD, is a nutrition writer based in New York City who also works as a supermarket RD, consultant, and guest speaker.*



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