



Careers in Plant-Based Nutrition

Thank you for reading this guide! By doing so you are increasing the chances that your work and contributions will improve human, animal, and environmental health more effectively – true public health, where the health of one serves the health of all.

As with any important decision, the key to making the best choice is to clearly define your goals. What kind of career do you want to pursue? In nutrition there are 4 major directions:

- Research
- Clinical
- Education
- Public Health

How do you see yourself spending your time? Do you want to be discovering new information? Do you want to be working with patients to reverse their health conditions? Do you want to be delivering presentations and writing? Do you want to be working on programmatic interventions to help underserved communities?

Perhaps you see yourself doing all of these. Take the time to find role models of people doing what you see yourself doing. Visualize your life as you would like it to be in your ideal profession. What is exciting about this? How do you want to be spending your time?

Now let's get right to that critical question – at the time of this writing, there really is not an accredited degree program with a specific focus on plant-based nutrition, or concentration or minor in the subject.

However, that doesn't mean your future is hopeless by any means! On the contrary, now is an exciting time to bring awareness of the power of plant-based nutrition into the mainstream academic, clinical, and other professional communities. Your decision to get involved now will make a significant impact on how nutrition is used to prevent and reverse disease, as well as what kind of impact our global food system has on the environment.

There are a couple of alternative paths (non-accredited degree programs) to working in the field of nutrition that some people do pursue, however this guide is focused on accredited programs.

It can be both an advantage and a challenge to pursue your schooling in an environment that is founded on an extremely different view of the world, i.e. a view that regards animal foods as a very important part of a balanced diet.

Advantages include:

- You will receive broad-based training in conventional thinking about diet and disease. This information will be a solid foundation to understanding nutrition in context.
- You will be exposed to the current thinking on nutrition in mainstream contexts, which will help you define the particular contribution you'd like to make.
- In most cases, you will receive much more rigorous training.
- There are many questions yet to be answered in the research arena, let alone investigated! Pursuing academic training in nutrition graduate school programs will allow you to encounter all kinds of ideas that bear consideration and research. For example, we do not have conclusive evidence that a 100% plant-based diet is better than a 95% plant-based diet, or that a raw food diet is better than a diet that contains whole, cooked foods. Traditional nutrition training will prevent you from drawing conclusions about WFPB without sufficient evidence, which will strengthen your critical thinking and your confidence in the conclusions you do eventually make.
- For those pursuing a more clinical route, it is extremely valuable to become familiar with the standard nutrition messages promoted to patients or students, since it will help you frame your own approach in how you want to address common questions and concerns.

It is important to know that while there is significant evidence that WFPB diets prevent and reverse chronic disease, the concept is much more readily embraced by the public and the popular media than by academic institutions or academics themselves. There will certainly be challenges associated with pursuing graduate training, including:

- You may feel intellectually lonely or have trouble getting support from your mentors for your interests.
- There are fewer opportunities for internships, or outside clinical or research experiences for students involving plant-based nutrition, so it may not be possible to get involved specifically in plant-based nutrition until after you graduate or are launched in your career.
- You may encounter some hostility towards plant-based nutrition.

Being surrounded by classmates and colleagues with worldview that excludes the value of plant-based nutrition can be frustrating. Try to maintain authentic points of connection with the people around you, whether they share your interests or not. If someone is pursuing nutrition as a career, it's likely that they have similar altruistic ambitions as you may to help individuals lead healthier lives and help society as a whole. Everyone is on their own path, and that may or may not include joining

you on yours. The more accepting you can become of this reality, the more effective you can be in fulfilling your own personal mission.

Fortunately, many professors at research institutions are quite open-minded, though they won't necessarily have in-depth knowledge of plant-based nutrition. If you are interested in doing research, be sure you feel comfortable with the faculty at the school you choose. As well as seeking the best training in research methods possible, you also will want to feel like you can be yourself as much as possible.

What If I Didn't Study Nutrition in College?

Many people from a wide variety of backgrounds end up working in the field nutrition and public health. One transition path from an unrelated undergraduate major is to do a Masters in Public Health (MPH) or other master's level training in public health. You may then be more able to continue on in a doctoral program more targeted at nutrition. Public health degrees are extremely versatile degrees, especially if your intended direction is education or public health interventions.

If you see yourself pursuing a clinical path of dietetics, and you did not major in nutrition or dietetics as an undergrad, you may want to do an internet search for "post-bac" programs for nutrition, dietetics, or medicine. "Post-bac" stands for post-baccalaureate, and these programs are designed to put college graduates through all the basic science or nutrition courses required to continue on in their chosen field.

Doctors receive virtually no training in nutrition, but if you are interested in working with patients, becoming a doctor is an excellent way to make your knowledge and services available to people who need them. If you choose to go into the medical profession it's best to remember that you will certainly have one of the harder and more lonely roads ahead in terms of how supportive your academic environment is. If you did not take the required courses for pre-meds as an undergraduate, again, you will want to investigate "post-bac" programs, or simply take individual courses at a nearby institution.

How to Find Nutrition Graduate Schools?

[American Society for Nutrition Program Directory](#)

This directory lists most current nutrition graduate programs (both masters and doctoral level) in the United States, organized by state.

How to Find Dietetics Programs?

[Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#) (formerly the American Dietetics Association)

This organization lists accredited programs that comprise the path to becoming a registered dietitian (RD), starting at the bachelor's level and up.

How to Find Post-Bac Programs?

[Association of American Medical Colleges](#)

The AAMC maintains an extensive list of “post-bac” programs for those who wish to apply to medical school but have yet to complete the required science courses.

Unfortunately, there is no one single directory for nutrition-oriented programs, but an internet search returns many options, and you should be able to narrow your results easily by geographic location.

Internships in Plant-Based Nutrition

[TrueNorth Health Center](#) in Santa Rosa, CA

The TrueNorth Health Center takes chiropractic, medical, osteopathic, dietetics, and research students as residential interns. TNHC is an incredible establishment that offers medically-supervised, water-only fasting, with whole food, plant-based nutrition as the foundation of their practice.

Best Wishes for Your Health and Your Career!

<http://www.plantbasedresearch.org>