

# LAUNCHING YOUR CAREER IN NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

SECOND EDITION

HOW TO THRIVE IN  
THE CLASSROOM,  
THE INTERNSHIP, AND  
YOUR FIRST JOB!

KYLE SHADIX, MS, RDN, CRC, FAND  
MILTON STOKES, PhD, MPH, RDN, FAND  
WITH CATHERINE CIOFFI, RDN



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# Launching Your Career in Nutrition and Dietetics

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**Kyle Shadix, MS, RDN, CRC, FAND,  
and Milton Stokes, PhD, MPH, RDN, FAND,  
with Catherine Cioffi, RDN**

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# Acknowledgments

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We are thrilled to have reached this exciting point—the second edition of *Launching Your Career in Nutrition and Dietetics*—and thank those who have joined and helped us on this endeavor!

We conceived the initial idea in 2002, sitting on a New York City bench outside Bobby's restaurant, thinking our entrepreneurial thoughts, imagining what our careers would look like if we could be anything in the world of nutrition and dietetics. Fast forward to today: Many interesting twists and turns presented themselves, including delightful characters and unexpected forks in the road, making the process feel slow and challenging at times, but also fast and fulfilling at others. And the journey isn't over!

Not only do we get the satisfaction of sharing our book idea in this handy guide, but we learned more than we ever imagined about personal and professional development, about persistence and patience, about writing and editing, and about how to enjoy and celebrate the outcome. I hope we never forget this meaningful experience.

We thank all of our monumental colleagues around the world who have helped us grow. They were doing all the wonderfully wild work in the real world of dietetics long before we thought about writing it all down, long before we wanted to encourage others in the profession to create new paradigms for work and careers. Many of those giants are featured in the "Movers and Shakers" chapter. And you know what they say about icebergs—we recognize that these are just an iceberg "tip" of worthy colleagues, and we wager you know

someone who is just as formidable who inspired you, too. There's just so much positivity to go around!

We owe gratitude to Jenna Bell, PhD, RD, our friend, co-conspirator, and coauthor on the first edition of *Launching*. Kyle and I got the project off the ground; Jenna landed the plane to thunderous applause.

In preparing the second edition, we gained momentum from our intern, Liz Huseman. Then Catherine Cioffi wonderfully pulled it all together.

To the amazing publishing team at the Academy: Thank you for hanging in there with us through the duration.

And to our families: We appreciate all you've done to encourage us with this edition.

Last, to the reviewers who generously contributed their time and expertise, we thank you for your guidance and advice in shaping this new edition.

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# About the Authors

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## *Kyle Shadix*

Chef Kyle Shadix is a certified research chef (CRC), registered dietitian (RDN), and fellow of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (FAND). Chef Kyle supports new product development and innovation for PepsiCo R&D in Valhalla, NY. Previously, Chef Kyle was the founder of his own agency, Nutrition & Culinary Consultants, acquired in 2006 by WPP, the world's largest communication company.

Prior to that, Kyle's food and nutrition career has spanned from the drive-thru window at McDonald's in rural Georgia to New York City's acclaimed Bouley and the Gotham Bar & Grill. Kyle has also worked as an instructor at Columbia University, as an operations manager at Lehman Brothers, and at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. In the past, Kyle has also served as the media spokesperson for companies including Dannon, the Mayo Clinic, Netflix, Celestial Seasonings, and the United States Tea Council. Kyle has served on the board of the American Institute of Wine and Food and has held numerous leadership positions for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and the International Association of Culinary Professionals. Kyle has received various awards and recognition, such as the Academy's Recognized Young Dietitian of the Year award for New York state, the Emily Quinn Professional Achievement Award from the University of Georgia Alumni Association, and the Publix Visiting Practitioner at the University of Georgia's Department of Food and Nutrition.

As of this printing, Kyle is studying part time for his PhD in food science at Rutgers University, NJ; he expects to complete the program by 2019. He received his master's degree in foods and nutrition from New York University; bachelor's degree in consumer foods and food science from the University of Georgia, Athens; and culinary training at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, NY, and Le Cordon Bleu in Paris.

### *Milton Stokes*

Milton Stokes is director of Global Health and Nutrition Outreach for Monsanto, where he engages with registered dietitian nutritionists and other health professionals on topics pertaining to food, agriculture, and nutrition. Before coming to Monsanto, Milton had a professorship and directed a dietetic internship at the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford, CT. He also owned a private nutrition counseling practice with offices throughout Connecticut and is a former restaurateur.

Milton was a national media spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics in the New York City media market and a freelance writer for consumer magazines covering food, nutrition, and health. Milton has authored several other books, including a *New York Times* best seller, *Flat Belly Diet! for Men* (2010).

Milton began his career in clinical nutrition in New York City with a food and nutrition management company. He has served in staff and management positions along the way as well as precepted dietetic interns and students from several colleges and programs. Milton's master's degree is in public health from Hunter College, and his clinical training was conducted at Yale New Haven Hospital affiliated with Yale University School of Medicine. Milton's doctoral degree from the University of Connecticut is in communication and marketing.

Visit him at [www.miltonstokes.com](http://www.miltonstokes.com), and follow him on Twitter @miltonstokes.

*Catherine Cioffi*

Catherine Cioffi is a registered dietitian nutritionist who began her nutrition career at Cornell University as an undergraduate nutritional sciences major. There she completed the accredited didactic program in dietetics, as well as the honors research program, and, upon graduating, was matched to the dietetic internship at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, MA. Catherine became a registered dietitian nutritionist in the fall of 2013 and then spent two years working in the food industry at PepsiCo, Inc, in Westchester, NY, where her work in research and development focused on the translation of nutrition science for consumers and for product and business applications. Today, she is pursuing her PhD in nutrition and health sciences at Emory University in Atlanta, GA. She hopes to focus her research on childhood overweight and obesity, specifically weight management strategies and chronic disease prevention.

# Foreword

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This second edition of *Launching Your Career in Nutrition and Dietetics* by Kyle Shadix and Milton Stokes is a timely update, as the profession of nutrition and dietetics continues to expand and evolve, both in practice opportunities and consumer awareness.

In selecting a career in nutrition and dietetics, it's critical to first prepare yourself academically and for an internship and then to decide what area of nutrition and dietetics interests you most. Should you be a clinical dietitian or a public health nutritionist? Do you like being part of a dynamic foodservice environment? How about providing nutrition services to preschoolers or elderly clients? Maybe you would like to develop recipes and educational materials for a food or agriculture company, or maybe you would like to give supermarket tours. If social justice is your interest, then perhaps you want to help fight food insecurity. Does your curiosity about food intake patterns or nutrient functions steer you toward research? Is your dream job at a health and fitness facility, where you can provide group diabetes or diet and exercise classes? Maybe your proficiency in other languages is the key to consulting as a niche practitioner who translates nutrition education materials. These are just a few of the paths you may choose to follow! The registered dietitian nutritionists (referred to throughout the book as RDNs) featured in Chapter 8, "Movers and Shakers," will give you a taste of some of the exciting opportunities within your reach.

A career in nutrition and dietetics offers many areas of practice, and you can choose to specialize or diversify. I chose to diversify and, over the course of my career, have worked as a clinical dietitian in

medical, surgical, and obstetrics and gynecology units; in a clinic with expectant moms and babies; in an agency developing programs for grades K–12 and after-school programs; for companies developing recipes and educational materials; for a national health study training interviewers; for schools teaching nursing, foodservice, undergraduate, and graduate students, or workers at child-care centers; and for agencies developing culturally appropriate menus or messaging. In my current role as professor and chairperson of the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of North Florida, it has become obvious to me that students need straightforward guidance from experienced dietetics practitioners. This helps students effectively plan their studies, be prepared to apply for and succeed in an internship, and gain the knowledge and skills they need for successful completion of the RDN exam and entry into the profession. Moreover, while serving as President of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (then the American Dietetic Association), I met hundreds of practitioners in a wide range of work settings. I also saw that when students know the many career options available to them, they become even more excited about their chosen career!

This latest edition of *Launching Your Career in Nutrition and Dietetics* provides a template for your studies as well as the selection and application process for a supervised practice experience (dietetic internship). Throughout the book, you will find tips for gaining valuable extracurricular experiences to help you develop a competitive dietetic internship application and launch your career. Above all, this book encourages you to seek additional experiences—ask your professors, shadow practitioners, attend professional meetings—to learn more about what interests you. But don't stop there: Investigate areas that you *think* might not interest you—and you may be surprised with the results.

Many thanks to Milton and Kyle for writing, and now updating, this essential guide. I have long admired their enthusiasm for and dedication to the profession. Even more admirable is their commitment to mentoring and helping others “learn the ropes.” Their advice can help you successfully navigate your studies, the internship

application, and passing the registration exam and can give you a comprehensive idea of the many opportunities the profession has to offer.

Best wishes for success and a long and fulfilling career in nutrition and dietetics.

Judith Rodriguez, PhD, RD

*Professor and Chair, Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, University of North Florida*

*Past President, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (2010–2011)*

# Introduction

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Greetings! We are pleased to be your tour guides as you navigate the path from dietetics student to dietetics intern and ultimately to practicing dietitian. We created this book because we wish we'd had an instruction manual like this when we were learning the ropes. Now that we're practicing and thriving in this exciting profession, we'd like to share our insights and experiences so your career journey can be a bit smoother.

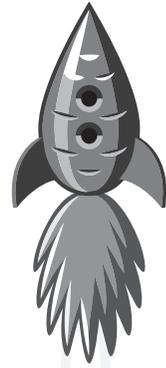
In its second edition, this book provides the latest information you'll need for entering and advancing in the field of nutrition and dietetics. While some of the information you'll find in this book can be found online (and we've provided many links to guide you), we think you'll agree that having it all in one place can be a significant time-saver. Along with the practical information, we've included candid advice and inspiration from several of our esteemed colleagues, including a chapter devoted to tips and advice for success from some "movers and shakers" in the field.

Our goal is to help you stay energized, focused, and productive on your journey to becoming a registered dietitian nutritionist. We hope you love the end result—being a dietitian—as much as we do!



## CHAPTER 5

# The Registration Examination for Dietitians



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### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- Review the full Registration Examination for Dietitians Study Outline. What areas do you think you might be stronger in than others? Explain why—this is an important practice because it can help guide your dietetics education and supervised practice preparation.
- We've named a few resources for exam preparation. Search online for additional resources that you might consider. (We know they are out there!) Describe their format and approach to exam preparation.
- Do you know what type of learner you are? Take the online Index of Learning Styles (ILS) survey developed at North Carolina State University, which can help you identify if you are a sensing and intuitive, a visual and verbal, or a sequential and global learner. The survey can be found on the university website ([www.engr.ncsu.edu/learning-styles](http://www.engr.ncsu.edu/learning-styles))

**T**HE DAY WILL COME WHEN YOU'RE ELIGIBLE TO SIT FOR the Registration Examination for Dietitians. When it does, celebrate everything you've already accomplished, including years of course work and many hours of supervised practice. Successful completion of the examination means that you will be recognized as a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN). Remember that the RDN credential is interchangeable with registered dietitian (RD). The aim of this chapter is to provide information, guidance, and tips for helping you feel confident about this next step and ensuring that you choose the right resources to successfully prepare for the exam.

## **RDN Exam 101**

The Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR), not to be confused with the Accreditation Council for Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND), is the independent credentialing agency that awards the RDN (or RD) credential to qualified candidates. According to its mission statement, CDR “administers rigorous, valid and reliable credentialing processes to protect the public and meet the needs of nutrition and dietetics practitioners, employers and consumers.”<sup>1</sup> All CDR certification programs are fully accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), the accrediting arm of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence.

In order to award credentials, CDR contracts with Pearson VUE, an examination testing agency, to administer the registration exam. Through a certification testing program, the registration exam content is designed to evaluate a potential candidate's readiness to practice at the entry level. You'll be tested on a range of dietetic concepts, procedures, and logic. You'll need to decipher graphs, tables, and formulas; solve nutritional problems; and make management decisions.

It is also important to know that the exam is administered as a computer-based test and, more specifically, as computer adaptive testing (CAT).<sup>2</sup> This is a type of electronic testing that administers questions strategically and efficiently in order to determine the test taker's competence. CAT is typically shorter than traditional pen-and-paper tests and provides you with a score immediately upon

## EXAM RESOURCES: FROM THE COMMITTEE ON DIETETIC REGISTRATION

- *Registration Examination for Dietitians Handbook for Candidates*
- *Registration Examination for Dietitians Study Outline*, which is updated every five years to reflect measured changes in practice identified in the entry-level dietetics practice audit

Both are available at the CDR's website under the "Graduating Student Information" section ([www.cdrnet.org/program-director/grad-info-student](http://www.cdrnet.org/program-director/grad-info-student)).

completion. More specifics and answers to common questions about the computer test will be provided later in the chapter.

### Application for Eligibility

Before taking the registration exam, you must apply to become eligible. To start this process, your dietetic internship, coordinated program, or individualized supervised practice pathway (ISPP) program director will fill out an online form to notify CDR that you are eligible to take the test. When CDR has processed the information and your eligibility has been established, the testing agency (Pearson VUE) will be contacted. Pearson will then send the candidate an "Authorization to Test" e-mail, a link to the *Registration Examination for Dietitians Handbook for Candidates*, and instructions for submitting the application fee, which is currently \$200 for the registration examination. The entire process, from when your director notifies CDR to when you are contacted by Pearson VUE, typically takes three to four weeks.

Next, when registering for your examination on Pearson VUE's website, you will need to do the following:

- Sign in to the CDR/Pearson VUE web portal using the username and password you received upon creating your Pearson VUE account.
- Begin the scheduling process by choosing your exam under the "Pre-approved Exams" section of the website.

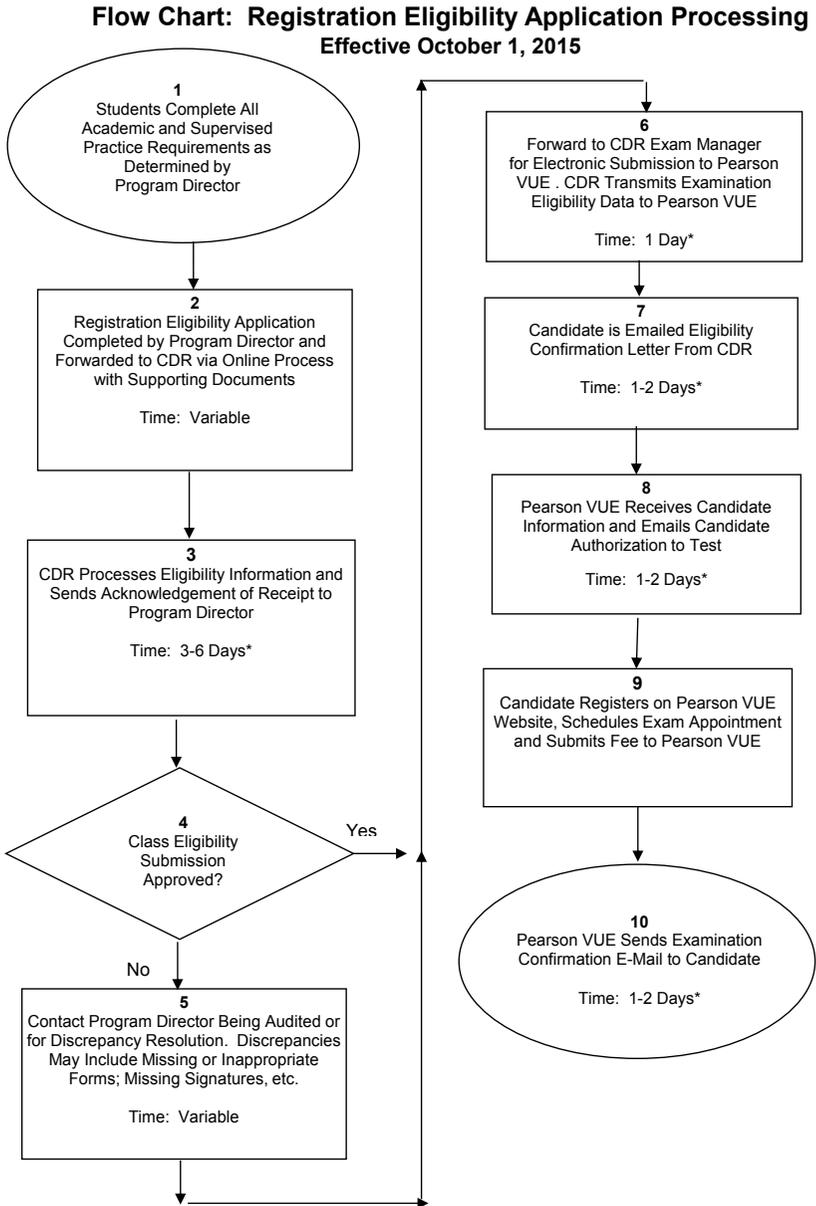
- Select, on the “Additional Questions from CDR” page, whether or not your name should be released along with your exam scores to your program director.
- Agree not to disclose any information about the exam to anyone else. In order to proceed with the application, you must select “I Agree.”
- Use the calendar tool to see available test times and select a date.
- Review the appointment details and proceed to checkout to pay for the testing appointment.
- Agree to the CDR policies to schedule your exam. The system will display the exam policies for cancellation and rescheduling.

If online registration is completed successfully, you will receive another e-mail from Pearson VUE to confirm your examination time and location. You have one year from the time you are authorized by CDR to schedule and take your examination. If you do not take the exam during this one-year period or if you do not pass the exam, you must contact CDR to be reauthorized to retake the test. You will also have to repay the examination fee and wait 45 calendar days between testing experiences. For other questions about special accommodations due to a disability and required documentation for accommodations, refer to CDR’s *Registration Examination for Dietitians Handbook for Candidates*.<sup>3</sup> All accommodation requests must be submitted to Pearson VUE using the forms found on their website.

## **Anatomy of the Exam**

All examinees are given a minimum of 125 questions including 25 pretest questions (which will not be scored). These pretest questions are being tested for future exams, but you won’t know which questions they are, so concentrate on answering all the questions as best as you can. Although you must answer at least 125 questions to receive a score, the maximum number of questions is 145. This range allows you more questions to answer correctly, if needed, to demonstrate your competency. See Figure 5.1.

**FIGURE 5.1.**  
**Flow chart of registration eligibility application processing**



\* Business Days

## HOW IT WORKS: COMPUTER-BASED TESTS

The registration exam is a computer-based, multiple-choice test. If you've taken the GREs, you will be familiar with the testing environment and question procedure. Here are the rules:

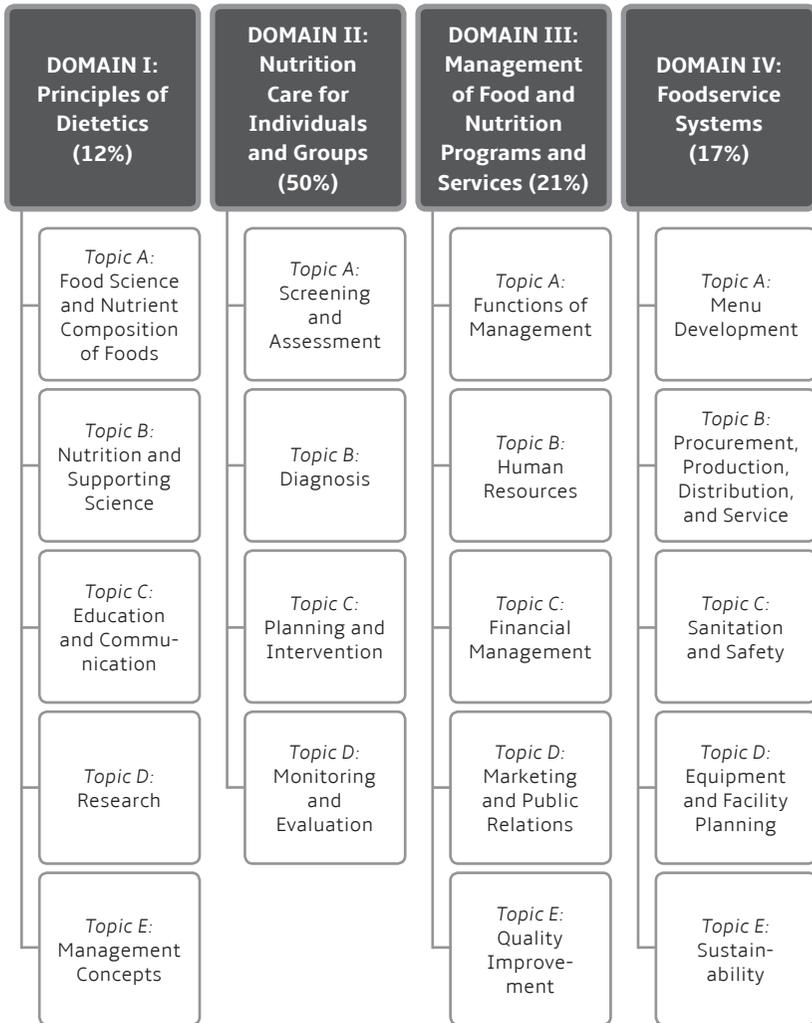
- The exam appointment is for 3 hours, which includes 2½ hours to take the examination and 30 minutes to complete an introductory tutorial and exit questionnaire.
- This tutorial provides instructions on taking the examination and a set of practice questions. A practice test is included in the *Study Guide for the Registration Examination for Dietitians*. Exam candidates can purchase the guide through the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics store ([www.eatrightstore.org](http://www.eatrightstore.org)).
- There is no skipping of questions to ponder and return later. You must answer each question as it comes before the computer will offer the next question.
- Items are administered in random order according to test specifications.

There are four domains, each with multiple subtopics that you'll be asked about on the exam (see Figure 5.2). These domains reflect competencies and knowledge that you should have gained during the didactic dietetic program and supervised practice preparation. They are updated regularly based on measured dietetics practice. The most recent dietetics practice audit took place in 2015, and based on this report, a new exam outline will take effect January 1, 2017.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, make sure to use the most up-to-date version of the CDR's Registration Examination for Dietitians Study Outline, *Handbook for Candidates*, and other materials.

## Tips and Resources for Exam Preparation

In the weeks and days leading up to the exam, it is very common to feel stressed and to doubt your knowledge. Although it is easier said than done, you will stay more focused and better prepared for the exam by figuring out ways to cope with these feelings, like utilizing wellness and counseling services or making time for physical activity

**FIGURE 5.2.**  
**Domain areas of the credentialing examination**



or relaxing activities such as yoga or cooking—whatever works for you from previous experience.

Solid preparation leading up to test day also helps relieve some of the potential anxiety. After all of the academic classes and supervised practice hours you've completed, a month of exam preparation is usually sufficient. Do not wait too long! We recommend taking the

## WANT TO PRACTICE FOR THE EXAM?

Many test prep books and review courses are available. To find resources or exam study materials, ask your advisers or mentors for recommendations; also ask your peers and recently registered dietitians to hear their experiences. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics offers an online student exam prep (StEP) resource, with a database of more than 700 questions on topics such as basic dietetics principles, nutrition care, management, and foodservice systems, plus practice quizzes and test-taking tips from successful RDNs. The resource is available for purchase at the eatrightSTORE ([www.eatrightstore.org](http://www.eatrightstore.org)).

test as soon as you can after completing your course work or supervised practice while allowing yourself at least a few weeks to review exam material. After you've picked a date, set up a study calendar to stay on track and schedule time to cover everything you need. You may also consider a review course, which can reduce some of the work involved in preparing for the registration exam because it offers structured lectures, study materials, sample questions, and plenty of practice. Although they can be expensive, review courses are usually designed to help focus your attention on the material that matters most.

## Test Day

The evening before the exam, prepare everything you need to take with you the next day. It is imperative that you take your valid government-issued photo ID. Without the ID, you will not be admitted to the exam. Get a good night's sleep, eat a well-balanced breakfast the morning of the exam, and allow yourself plenty of time to travel to your testing center.

Once seated at the testing station, you'll have a 30-minute tutorial to become familiar with the computer process and to review the instructions. An online or simple handheld calculator will be provided for you by the testing center, so get familiar with this before starting. You have exactly 2½ hours to complete the exam, which begins when

you click on your first question. Remember that after advancing you cannot go back to review answers, change responses, or skip questions, so give each question adequate consideration before moving on. If you need to leave the room in the middle of the exam, you must have the proctor's permission, and you will not get that time back (you cannot pause or extend the testing time).

Fortunately, you'll get your results right at the testing center, following completion of the exam. A score of 25 or higher (on a scale of 1 to 50) is needed to pass.

## **If You Don't Pass...**

### **SITUATIONS THAT CANCEL YOUR RIGHT TO TAKE THE EXAM**

- It's been over a year since the date listed on your authorization to test e-mail.
- You fail to cancel your testing appointment before the 48-hour/two-day deadline.
- On test day, you arrive late or don't have a valid government-issued photo ID, or the name on your valid government-issued ID does not match the name on your Pearson VUE profile.
- You are caught cheating.
- You sit for the exam but fail to complete it within 2½ hours.
- You abort the examination before it's completed.

There is always a second chance if you don't pass the exam on your first try, and this doesn't mean you won't be a successful RDN. If you complete the exam but do not get a passing score, you can apply for reauthorization to retake the exam by contacting CDR directly to reapply and pay another examination fee to Pearson VUE. And remember that even though the RDN credential may be necessary for certain careers, a degree in nutrition and dietetics alone still offers viable career options. Some examples are certain jobs in food sales,

public health nutrition, and foodservice management. Someone with a degree in dietetics, nutrition, or food science could certainly be a step ahead of someone who does not have this type of education.

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# Afterword

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**H**I THERE! IT'S US, KYLE AND MILTON AGAIN. IF YOU'RE reading this, we hope it's because you've recently earned your RDN credential and have kept this guide by your side along the way.

As we said at the start, we wish we'd had something like this book when we were learning the ropes. We hope we've made it easier for you to navigate your way to the RDN credential and that you're now ready and energized to make the most of your career! Being an RDN is a rewarding career choice, and we hope you love it as much as we do.

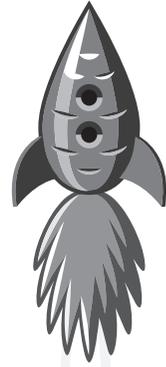
If you've taken our advice, you are probably already volunteering for our profession (or working on it), and putting your networking skills to good use, which means we'll run into each other soon enough. Though we are nearly 67,000 strong (in the United States alone), the nutrition and dietetics community is relatively small (in a good way), so it's likely our paths will cross someday. When you see us, please say hello!

We genuinely hope this guide has been a valuable companion to you. Good luck, and thank you for all the work you'll be doing in the name of nutrition.

Our best wishes,  
—Kyle and Milton

APPENDIX

# Leading Nutrition-Related Organizations



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**Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics**

120 South Riverside Plaza,  
Suite 2000  
Chicago, IL 60606-6995  
Phone: 800/877-1600  
[www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

**American Association of Diabetes  
Educators**

200 W. Madison Street, Suite 800  
Chicago, IL 60606  
Phone: 800/338-3633  
[www.diabeteseducator.org](http://www.diabeteseducator.org)

**American College of Sports  
Medicine**

401 West Michigan Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3233  
Phone: 317/637-9200  
[www.acsm.org](http://www.acsm.org)

**American Diabetes Association**

1701 North Beauregard Street  
Alexandria, VA 22311  
Phone: 800/342-2383  
[www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)

**American Heart Association**

7272 Greenville Avenue  
Dallas, TX 75231  
Phone: 800/242-8721  
[www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)

**American Society for Nutrition**

9211 Corporate Boulevard,  
Suite 300  
Rockville, MD 20850  
Phone: 240/428-3650  
[www.nutrition.org](http://www.nutrition.org)

**American Society for Parenteral  
and Enteral Nutrition (A.S.P.E.N.)**

8630 Fenton Street, Suite 412  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
Phone: 301/587-6315  
E-mail: [aspen@nutritioncare.org](mailto:aspen@nutritioncare.org)  
[www.nutritioncare.org](http://www.nutritioncare.org)

**Association of Nutrition and  
Foodservice Professionals**

406 Surrey Woods Drive  
St. Charles, IL 60174  
Phone: 800/323-1908  
[www.anfonline.org](http://www.anfonline.org)

**Dietitians of Canada**

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[www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca)

**Gerontological Society of America**

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