

can you become a dietitian with an exercise science degree

Can you become a dietitian with an exercise science degree? This question often arises among students or professionals who have an interest in nutrition and health but come from a background focused on physical fitness and exercise. Understanding the pathways to becoming a licensed dietitian, as well as the role that an exercise science degree can play in this journey, is essential for those considering a career in nutrition.

Overview of Dietitian Qualifications

To become a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN), individuals must meet specific educational and professional requirements. These typically include:

1. Education: A bachelor's degree in dietetics, nutrition, or a related field.
2. Internship: Completion of a supervised practice program, often referred to as a dietetic internship (DI).
3. Examination: Passing the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) exam to obtain the RDN credential.
4. State Licensure: Many states require dietitians to be licensed or certified.

The Role of an Exercise Science Degree

An exercise science degree focuses on the principles of physical activity, exercise techniques, and the physiological effects of exercise on the human body. While this degree does not directly qualify someone to become a dietitian, it can provide a solid foundation for those looking to integrate nutrition with fitness. Here's how an exercise science background can be advantageous:

Relevant Knowledge and Skills

1. Understanding of Human Physiology: Exercise science programs typically cover topics related to human anatomy, physiology, and biomechanics. This knowledge can be beneficial when studying nutrition, as understanding how the body utilizes nutrients is crucial.
2. Nutrition Basics: Many exercise science programs include coursework in basic nutrition, which can provide a foundational understanding of dietary needs and food science.
3. Behavioral Aspects of Health: Exercise science often encompasses studies on motivation and behavioral change, critical components in promoting healthy eating habits and lifestyle changes.

Career Integration

For professionals with an exercise science degree, there are various ways to integrate dietetics into their careers:

- **Personal Training:** By obtaining additional certifications in nutrition, exercise science graduates can offer holistic coaching that combines fitness and dietary guidance.
- **Wellness Coaching:** Many wellness programs seek professionals who understand both physical activity and nutrition, allowing exercise science graduates to thrive in integrated health roles.

Pathways to Becoming a Dietitian

While an exercise science degree provides a good foundation, it typically does not meet the educational requirements for becoming a dietitian. Here's how to navigate the path:

Step 1: Assess Your Current Education

If you hold a degree in exercise science, you will need to ensure that you complete the necessary coursework that aligns with dietetics. This may include:

- Advanced Nutrition
- Food Science
- Medical Nutrition Therapy
- Community Nutrition

Step 2: Complete a Dietetics Program

To fulfill the educational requirements for dietetics, you can either:

1. **Pursue a Master's Degree in Dietetics:** Many universities offer Master's programs that combine dietetics and nutrition studies. An exercise science degree may provide some transferable credits, but you will still need to complete a significant portion of coursework specific to dietetics.
2. **Enroll in a Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD):** Some universities offer DPD programs that provide the necessary coursework to qualify for an internship and the RDN exam.

Step 3: Dietetic Internship

After completing the educational requirements, the next step is to apply for a dietetic internship. This is a critical component of becoming an RDN. Internships typically last 6-12 months and involve hands-on practice in various settings, such as hospitals, community programs, and food service operations.

Step 4: Pass the CDR Exam

Once you have completed your internship, you will be eligible to sit for the CDR exam. Passing this exam is essential for obtaining the RDN credential.

Step 5: Obtain State Licensure

After becoming an RDN, check the specific licensing requirements in your state, as many states require dietitians to be licensed or certified.

Alternative Paths for Exercise Science Graduates

If you find that becoming a registered dietitian isn't the right fit for you, there are several alternative career options that leverage your exercise science background:

1. Sports Nutritionist

While a registered dietitian has a broader scope, a sports nutritionist specializes in the dietary needs of athletes. Additional certifications can enhance your credibility in this area.

2. Health Coach

Health coaches focus on helping individuals achieve their wellness goals, often integrating fitness and nutrition. While this role may not require a dietitian credential, knowledge of nutrition is vital.

3. Corporate Wellness Coordinator

Many companies seek professionals to develop and oversee wellness programs for employees. Your knowledge in both exercise and nutrition can be a significant asset in this role.

4. Fitness and Nutrition Writer

If you enjoy writing, consider a career as a freelance writer or blogger focusing on fitness and nutrition topics. This path allows you to share your knowledge and passion with a broader audience.

Conclusion

In summary, while you cannot directly become a registered dietitian with an exercise science degree alone, the foundation it provides can significantly aid in your journey toward this goal. By supplementing your education with the necessary nutrition coursework and completing a dietetic internship, you can successfully transition into the field of dietetics. Additionally, if you wish to stay within the realm of fitness, numerous alternative career paths await exercise science graduates, allowing you to leverage your knowledge and passion for health and nutrition in various ways. Whether you choose to pursue dietetics or another avenue in health and wellness, your background in exercise science will serve as a valuable asset in promoting a healthier lifestyle for yourself and others.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I become a dietitian with a degree in exercise science?

Yes, you can become a dietitian with a degree in exercise science, but you will need to complete additional coursework in nutrition and dietetics, as well as a dietetic internship.

What additional qualifications do I need to become a registered dietitian after studying exercise science?

After earning your exercise science degree, you will need to complete a master's degree in nutrition or dietetics, a supervised practice internship, and pass the Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) exam.

Are there any advantages to becoming a dietitian with an exercise science background?

Yes, having an exercise science background can provide a strong understanding of physical fitness and how it relates to nutrition, making you a well-rounded professional who can address both diet and exercise needs.

How long does it typically take to become a dietitian after obtaining an exercise science degree?

Typically, it can take an additional 2-3 years to complete the necessary coursework, internship, and RDN exam after earning your exercise science degree.

Is it common for exercise science graduates to pursue a career in dietetics?

Yes, it is becoming increasingly common for exercise science graduates to pursue careers in dietetics, as the fields are complementary and many health professionals recognize the importance of both nutrition and exercise in overall wellness.

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