

# NUTRITIONAL COUNSELING

## FAST FACTS

- Nutrition is a key determinant in 3 of the top 4 U.S. causes of death — heart disease, stroke, and cancer.
- Nutrition is a key component of most chronic conditions primary care clinicians treat: diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.
- One [survey](#) of 451 family physicians found that 58 percent believed that most of their patients would benefit from nutrition counseling.

## WHAT IS NUTRITION COUNSELING?

A nutrition counselor talks with a patient about his or her diet and finds ways to change it to support that person's health. A nutrition consult typically begins with a one-hour evaluation to assess the patient and the patient's diet. The nutritionist may also assess sleep patterns, physical activity, and other lifestyle factors.

With this information, the nutritionist works with the patient to identify opportunities for change. This does not always mean starting a low calorie diet. It could mean picking one thing to change, such as drinking less soda or eating more protein. Changing even one thing can have a big impact on health and healing.

Planning comes next. For instance, a nutrition counselor can help people find ways to eat healthy without spending a lot of money, or how to choose healthy options when eating out. With cancer or another disease, the nutritionist helps the patient get necessary nutrients and stay as healthy as possible during and after treatment.

## What does the science show?

Numerous studies find that improving diet can provide the same, if not better, benefits than medical therapy with less risk, fewer side effects, lower costs, and shorter hospital stays. Most major medical guidelines include nutrition as a key part of managing chronic disease. This includes guidelines on nutrition in cancer treatment and for survivors, such as the ESPEN guidelines.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force found good evidence that dietary counseling for patients with risk factors for heart disease can improve eating habits, particularly if delivered by nutritionists, dietitians, and specially trained primary health care professionals.<sup>2</sup> Similar studies have shown benefits for diabetes,<sup>3</sup> obesity,<sup>4</sup> and hypertension.

### Is it OK to follow the latest diet trends?

Don't be fooled by fad diets. Professionals know that the best diets to follow for general health are variations of the Mediterranean and DASH diets. People with cancer should talk to a nutrition counselor about the best choices, as they need more protein and fat than people practicing "healthy eating" in order to avoid losing muscle and weight during treatment.<sup>5</sup> Extreme diet changes can harm you — both physically and mentally. Losing weight and gaining it back many times is bad for health and makes permanent weight loss more difficult.

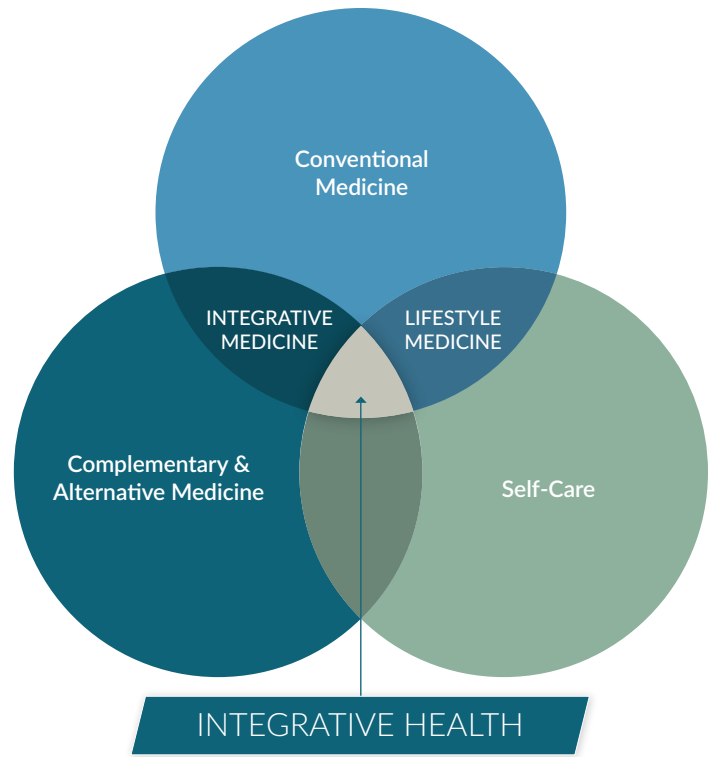
## Who can benefit from nutrition counseling?

Nutrition counseling is used to treat many different health conditions. These include:

- Cancer
- Diabetes and pre-diabetes
- Digestive problems
- Eating disorders
- Metabolic-associated liver disease (MASLD)
- Food allergies and sensitivities
- Heart disease, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure
- Obesity
- Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)

Nutrition counseling can also help people who have HIV, COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), and other conditions, and is part of treatment for eating disorders.





**References**

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4. Aprile G, Basile D, Giaretta R, et al. The clinical value of nutritional care before and during active cancer treatment. *Nutrients*. 2021 Apr 5;13(4):1196.
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