

Careers for Nutritionists in Research and Tertiary Education

We have Dr Susan Torres, lecturer from the School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences at Deakin University. She will be talking to us about careers for nutritionists in research and tertiary education.

Interview

1. What does a research nutritionist do?

A research nutritionist is involved in all stages of a research project. This includes conducting a literature review and developing a research question. e.g. Can stress influence the intake of salt? The research nutritionist would also be involved in the design and conduct of a research study. e.g. recruiting subjects, assessing dietary intake by 24 hour recall or food frequency questionnaire, analysis and interpretation of data and then final dissemination of results in the form of publication and/or presentation at a research conference.

2. What would you do as a nutritionist working in tertiary education?

You would be responsible for running a unit e.g. setting assessment tasks, developing the unit content. As new information comes to hand you would incorporate this into the curriculum so that your students are getting the most recent information. Day to day activities would include giving lectures and running tutorials if an on campus unit or if running an off campus unit then liaising with students online predominantly.

3. Where do research nutritionists work?

A good place to start would be looking at your local universities, particularly if they have a Nutrition Department as they are likely to have researchers who will be conducting nutrition research. Organisations such as CSIRO (Adelaide), Nutrition Australia, National Heart Foundation and Diabetes Australia are also examples of places who conduct nutrition research.

4. What experience and qualifications do you need to work in research?

There is potential to work as a research nutritionist after completing the postgraduate Human Nutrition courses. To progress in this area, a PhD would enhance your future opportunities.

5. What experience and qualifications do you need to work in tertiary education?

You could work as a sessional lecturer/tutor after completing the postgraduate Human Nutrition course. To progress in this field you would also need to complete a PhD.

6. What are the highlights of working in research and tertiary education?

You are working at the coalface of nutrition research and constantly being challenged. You could be responsible for a major breakthrough in nutrition research. An example of this was the finding of the relationship between folate and neural tube defects that led to public health guidelines for all women of child bearing age to have folic acid supplementation.

7. Advice for students who are interested in research

I would recommend completing the nutrition research electives to give you a good grounding in research methods.

8. Advice for students who are interested in tertiary education

Get in contact with your local university nutrition department to see if you could do some casual lecturing or tutoring. This could be your foot in the door and give you some experience in lecturing and other academic activities.