



College of  
Dietitians  
of Ontario

## Code of Ethics

Ethics is about the values that guide dietitians' decisions and actions in various contexts. This Code of Ethics has been developed to clearly articulate the application of four healthcare ethical principles: beneficence, non-maleficence, respect for persons/justice and respect for autonomy all of which guide evidence-based dietetic practice.

All members are responsible for applying the Code of Ethics requirements in the context of their own specific professional working environments. The College holds members accountable for adhering to the Code of Ethics and will inquire into allegations of a breach and take appropriate action(s) in relation to the severity of the breach.

The Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice and all relevant legislation, policies and guidelines are companion documents and none of these should be read or applied in isolation of the others. It is not unusual for there to be duplication within these documents as requirements may be both ethical and legal.

### **1. Beneficence - to do good: Dietitians will act in the best interest of clients and society.**

#### **Application:**

**A registered dietitian demonstrates this principle by ensuring that they:**

- a. Demonstrate professionalism, constructive dialogue and civility in all communications, including social media.
- b. Provide accurate and truthful information in all communications.
- c. Uphold professional boundaries and abstain from sexual relationships with any clients.
- d. Report inappropriate behavior or treatment of a client by another dietitian or other professionals.
- e. Exercise professional judgement by taking responsibility and being able to account for one's actions when practising dietetics.
- f. Bill clients and document work done to reflect the extent of delivered services.
- g. Collaborate with interprofessional colleagues, participate in and contribute to decisions that affect the well-being of clients.

## 2. Non-Maleficence - do no harm: Dietitians will avoid and minimize harm to others.

### Application:

A registered dietitian demonstrates this principle by ensuring that they:

- a. Refrain from communicating false, fraudulent, deceptive, misleading, disparaging or unfair statements or claims.
- b. Refrain from verbal/physical/emotional/sexual harassment.
- c. Avoid conflicts of interest. Identify and manage situations that are, or may lead to, conflicts of interest, including any financial interests in products or services that are recommended. Refrain from accepting gifts or services which potentially influence or which may give the appearance of influencing professional judgement.
- d. Identify other source(s) of potential risk of harm that may be related to: the dietitian (competence, confidence, motivation, stress level, incapacity); or work factors (issues with co-workers, interprofessional relations, workload, staffing, client complexity).
- e. Identify risk of harm characteristics:
  - i. type of harm;
  - ii. the likelihood of the risk (rare, unlikely, possible, almost certain);
  - iii. frequency (almost never, sometimes, every day, monthly, always);
  - iv. impact or severity of harm (low, moderate, high, extreme),
  - v. duration (one-time, short, long or indefinite period of time).
  - vi. determine whether the risk of harm is perceived (irrational beliefs or emotions) or rational.
- f. Assess the various protective factors that would best mitigate the risk of harm in the specific situation.
  - i. Protective factors in place or to be developed must protect a client's right to autonomy, respect, confidentiality, dignity, and access to information or increase safety, effectiveness of treatment to reduce the risk of harm.
  - ii. Protective risk responses must be client-centred and aligned with principles of public protection and safe dietetic practices. Deciding to do nothing may be a viable risk response but avoiding a response or ignoring a risky situation may lead to harm or professional misconduct. Communication and networking may be necessary for the implementation of effective protective factors in response to mitigating risk.
  - iii. Determine whether others (interprofessional care team, organization, regulatory college, professional association or other stakeholders) need to be involved in the decision-making process, development and implementation of the protective factors.

## 3. Respect for Persons/Justice: Dietitians will show respect and treat others fairly and equitably.

### Application:

A registered dietitian demonstrates this principle by ensuring that they:

- a. Act in a caring and respectful manner.
- b. Practice in a culturally competent approach. Cultural competence involves refocusing one's behaviour, attitude, awareness, knowledge, skills and even policies to better serve the interests of the public.
- c. Collaborate with others to reduce health disparities and protect human rights.
- d. Promote fairness and objectivity with fair and equitable treatment.
- e. Contribute knowledge, skills and judgement and a professional attitude focused on client welfare to activities that promote safe, client-centred dietetic practices.
- f. Practise using an evidence-based approach to meet a client's needs. Evidence-based practice refers to using the best evidence in balancing anticipated benefits and risks in supporting decisions for optimizing client-centered dietetic services.
- g. Practise within the limits of scope of practice, know when to refer and collaborate with the inter-professional team.

### **4. Respect for Autonomy: Dietitians will treat clients and/or their substitute decision-maker as self-governing decision-makers.**

### Application:

A registered dietitian demonstrates this principle by ensuring that they:

- a. Acknowledge and accept client's choices when obtaining informed consent for nutrition treatment and knowledgeable informed consent for collecting, using and disclosing personal health information.
- b. Consider the specific needs, wants and goals of clients to provide client-centered services. Be open to client input, respect decisions, accommodate choices and document the treatment accordingly.
- c. Implement appropriate measures to protect personal health information using appropriate techniques. Safeguard client confidentiality according to current legislation, regulation and standards.
- d. Respect client autonomy by exercising professional judgment within the limits of individual competence and collaborate with others, seek counsel, and make referrals as appropriate.

## References:

1. Ontario College of Pharmacist Code of Ethics 2015
2. Fornari A. Approaches to ethical decision-making. *J Acad Nutr Diet.* 2015;115(1):119-121. 2. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Definition of Terms List. June, 2017 (Approved by Definition of Terms Workgroup Quality Management Committee May 16, 2017). Accessed October 11, 2017.  
<http://www.eatrightpro.org/~media/eatrightpro%20files/practice/scope%20standards%20of%20practice/academydefinitionoftermstlist.ashx>
3. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: Revised 2017 Standards of Practice in Nutrition Care and Standards of Professional Performance for Registered Dietitian Nutritionists. *J Acad Nutr Diet.* 2018; 118: 132-140.
4. Corey, G., Corey, M. S., & Callanan, P. (1998). *Issues and ethics in the helping professions.* Toronto: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company; Syracuse School of Education. (n.d.). An ethical decision making model, accessed July 24, 2018, [http://soe.syr.edu/academic/counseling\\_and\\_human\\_services/modules/Common\\_Ethical\\_Issues/ethical\\_decision\\_making\\_model.aspx](http://soe.syr.edu/academic/counseling_and_human_services/modules/Common_Ethical_Issues/ethical_decision_making_model.aspx)