

Nutrition Coaching Guide to Success

WHAT YOU'LL DO AND HOW TO SUCCEED



INTERNATIONAL
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ASSOCIATION

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Nutrition Coaching — What You'll Actually Do



Working as a nutrition coach is something you can do as a stand-alone career or as an additional offering with your personal training. Either way, you'll find that the heart and soul of this job is very similar to training and fitness: you are helping people make real, lasting, and positive health changes.

What's different about nutrition coaching are the nuts and bolts of the knowledge you impart to clients and the tasks you'll do with them. For many people, making changes to eating habits and food choices is much more difficult than adding in workouts and fitness. Your tasks as a coach will include straightforward tasks like providing guidance about healthy foods but also finding ways to remove the psychological and emotional barriers that keep people from eating well.

To be a good nutrition coach and to help your clients, your tasks begin with determining their nutritional level. When you know where they stand you can then develop and assign specific and individualized tasks that help them set and meet health and nutrition goals.

Assessing and Understanding Nutritional Levels for Effective Coaching

There are many factors that will go into [being an effective nutrition coach](#). One of the most important is being able to determine where your clients stand at any given moment. The tasks of a nutrition coach can only be effective if they are appropriate for the individual. Assess your clients at the beginning of your journey together and throughout your coaching sessions so that you can assign the right tasks to meet their goals.

Level 1 – The Fundamental Nutrition Coaching Tasks

Most clients are at level one, and even for those with more advanced habits and knowledge, level one coaching is a good place to start. You can't go wrong with the fundamentals. Level one clients work out fewer than six hours per week; they struggle with consistency and staying on track with healthy habits; and they have a lot of limiting factors preventing change. Their main goals are to get healthier and fitter.

Level 2 – Going Beyond Good Health

Few of your clients ever need to be at level two. These are the people who already work out a lot and understand good nutrition. They mostly eat well and are healthy. What they want from a nutrition coach is to address performance and appearance goals. They want to improve their half marathon times or increase muscle size. A lot of level two nutrition coaching tasks are short-term, designed to meet specific goals like these.

Level 3 – Serious Athletes

As with level two, clients at level three are interested in improving performance, appearance, or both. The difference between these two levels is the degree of intensity, knowledge, and consistency. Fitness and health are their lives, and there are no barriers. These are serious or professional athletes looking to make minor tweaks.

Level three has the potential to be harmful: clients may go too far, lose too much body fat, disrupt hormones, get injured, develop mental health issues related to food, and even cut out other healthy lifestyle factors, like socializing with friends, due to lack of time. If you ever have a level three client, monitor them carefully.

Level One Clients – Removing Barriers

As mentioned, most clients you encounter in nutrition coaching will be at level one, even if they think otherwise. And, those who have some aspects of level two are still likely to spend at least some time in level one. This is one of the most important stages for you as a coach to focus on, and that focus is largely on identifying limiting factors.

What are the barriers holding back a level one nutrition client? What limits them from achieving their goals? Two of the biggest areas in which you'll find these roadblocks and where you can really help your clients are in eating habits and life skills.

Food Choices and Eating Habits

Here are some things you'll help level one clients with when it comes to choosing foods and how they eat:

- Choosing more healthful, whole foods and eating fewer processed foods
- Drinking too many sugary beverages or too much alcohol, or both
- Failing to feel satisfied after eating
- Eating too quickly and distractedly
- Eating on an irregular schedule
- Not recognizing fullness cues
- Eating too much at once, even binge eating
- Eating emotionally

Life Skills

Your level one clients are also likely to struggle with some essential skills that are useful for eating well and developing better habits. You'll likely help them with:

- Basic food preparation and cooking.
- Grocery shopping for health and nutrition.
- Being pushed by others to eat junk food or drink too much.
- Impulsive choices regarding food.

Level Two Clients – Getting Specific with Goals

The tasks for coaching clients at level two will be more focused. Your clients here will have more specific goals like adding muscle mass or hitting a specific performance target for a race or competition. They already have good eating habits and life skills that they practice most of the time. Your tasks will be to tweak those and help clients stay on track.

Some examples of eating and food tasks you may work on with level two clients include:

Eliminating nearly all processed foods.

- Choosing the most nutrient dense foods.
- Creating a supplement plan.
- Making a plan to cut back drastically or completely on alcohol.

Level Three Clients – Refining Goals

With level three clients commitment is never an issue. These clients are focused and have no barriers to break. They want to refine their goals and hit very specific targets. Just keep in mind that these should always be temporary. No one can or should stay at this level indefinitely. Here are examples of tasks you may have with a level three client:

- Weighing and measuring food
- Limiting food choices
- Making a plan to cycle macronutrients
- Choosing the right supplements
- Cutting out caffeine and alcohol
- Planning hydration exactly in order to meet weight or body goals for competitions
- Setting clear expectations with family and friends
- Developing an exact daily schedule for eating, training, and other tasks
- Making decisions in advance and leaving nothing to chance

Clearly, the tasks you'll have as a nutrition coach can vary widely. From basic meal prep and grocery shopping with level one clients to specific hydration schedules with level three clients your work will never be boring. Expect to tackle practical tasks like balancing nutrients and food choices but also more psychological tasks like connecting feelings to food and eating habits.

The best nutrition coaches are prepared to work with a range of clients with different needs, limitations, strengths, and goals. When you understand your clients you will be best able to help them by developing and assigning the right tasks.

Ready to expand your nutrition knowledge and help even more clients? Specializing as a nutritionist gives you the ability to offer more services to your clients and help them achieve the best results possible.

Common Mistakes to Avoid



Many clients seek out fitness professionals for guidance and assistance with their fitness and nutrition goals to improve their health and longevity. A successful health coach can create a coaching package that encompasses lifestyle changes, whole foods, and, if desired, weight loss. More than just personal training, a health coach is a nutrition expert and creates an integrative nutrition plan for the fundamentals all the way to refined and specific goals. Clients can range from general population to an athlete. What a nutrition coach will actually do varies with the client and their goals.

Whether you work in person or conduct online coaching, there are several common mistakes made in a health coaching business. Knowing and understanding these common faux pas will help a coach provide the most comprehensive and effective nutrition coaching possible while maintaining an effective and professional reputation.

Keep Clear Boundaries

When working as closely with people as a personal trainer or nutrition coach does, you are more than just a weight loss coach. You become a confidante, sounding board, and sometimes a friend.

A coach must work to keep the lines between personal and professional clear and consistent. It is not uncommon to learn personal and sensitive details about health coaching clients, but how the coach uses the information gained is what matters most. Use the information to create an effective coaching program that considers the client's personality, past experiences, and future goals. An educated nutrition coach has a firm grasp on the stages of behavior change, motivation, and decision-making similar to a life coach to make a healthy habit a lasting one. The trainer-client relationship is not one to take advantage of.

Engaging in overly personal conversations or relationships with clients is outside of the scope of practice for a nutrition coach. Keep all coaching about the client's health, not their personal life. Anything too intimate may make a client uncomfortable or give them cause to stop using your services.

Pace the Delivery of Information

A nutrition coach, dietitian, or personal trainer has a lot of knowledge to share with the world! What the professional finds fun and interesting may not feel the same to the client. If too much information is provided to a client in a short time, they may become overwhelmed or discouraged despite the intention of empowering them.

Part of an effective nutrition plan involves a stepwise nutrition program discussing macronutrients, food selection, and potentially sports nutrition for those who are active. This includes understanding healthy fat and getting enough protein daily, exchanging processed foods for whole foods, and nutrition for athletic performance.

Help clients understand that it will take several sessions to get through all the relevant information in a way that they can learn it, understand it, and apply it to their life. For example, take one session to discuss macronutrients and another to understand metabolic rates and their ideal number of calories. A third session can dive into how the calories you established will help them lose body fat or gain muscle mass. Be sure to allow time to answer any questions the client may have along the way!

Separate Nutrition and Fitness Coaching

Often, a [certified personal trainer](#) will expand their services and begin to offer nutrition coaching to clients or as a stand-alone service. The mistake is made when the two services are combined into one. Not all clients want or will need assistance with their diet and would prefer to focus on strength training.

If you are a running coach, be a running coach! If the athletes you train wish to improve their health and learn more about nutrition, offer that coaching as a separate service in a separate session for a fee.

This nutrition mistake will cost you money in the long run! Coaches who offer training AND nutrition to clients may find it challenging to charge a separate fee for the service in the future.

There are many credentials a trainer can complete to add to the depth of their knowledge. Check out the [ISSA specializations](#) available that can ignite your passion and expand your services!

Place Value in Nutrition Coaching

Helping people with their nutrition is a critical part of their health and fitness goals. Their diet is what fuels their body during a workout and as they move through their day. Many professionals in fitness fail to place a value on the guidance they can offer to enhance and expedite results.

To avoid this mistake, talk to all clients briefly about their nutrition and offer your services during your initial meeting. Explain that overall health coaching will benefit them far more than isolated fitness or nutrition training. If they do not commit to nutrition coaching initially, there is an opportunity to gain their trust and show them results over time and add the service later.

Also, when a nutrition coach paces the delivery of the information they have to share, they are effectively creating a program. This means it will be an integrated and long-lasting relationship between the coach and client to constantly work towards, reassess, and refine their goals. There is value built into the fact that programs last for weeks or months at a time and yield better results than “a session.”

Be Well-Rounded and Be Successful!

Keep these common mistakes in mind as you set out into or continue on with your fitness journey. Acknowledge that every interaction you have with a client is critical to a healthy professional relationship and works to build your reputation. Remain informative, concise, and engaging and clients will stick with you no matter what!

With a few [specializations](#) under your belt and [nutrition](#) as a part of your arsenal, any fitness professional can grow in the field. The more you know, the better you will be at getting clients results regardless of their starting point or breadth of their goals.

5 Strategies for Success



As a personal trainer, you know nutritional coaching is a huge part of your fitness client's success. A question to ask yourself is, "Am I taking advantage of building nutrition into my business?" For a lot of trainers and coaches, the answer is no, and not because they don't want to but because they don't know where to start.

If you think about it, you charge for your fitness coaching, so why would you not want to provide nutrition coaching at that same rate?

Here are five ways to get your nutritional coaching started that you can implement right away.

1. Add-on Individual Nutrition Coaching Sessions

You already have fitness clients; the first step is to obtain a nutrition certification. The nutrition certification is important when it comes to coaching clients, they want to know that you have your education and that you are credible. Take a look at the [ISSA Certified Nutritionist program](#).

Once you have your certification, you can then start offering services to your current personal training clients. This takes almost no marketing outside of talking to your current coaching clients.

Initially, to get clients interested, you can even offer an introductory rate for the first 5 to 10 clients that take advantage to create that urgency. In exchange for the introductory rate, you will want to request testimonials from those clients on their success. You can then use those testimonials as marketing materials in the gym. You can also use those testimonials to advertise your nutritional coaching services on [social media](#).

2. Offer Small Group Nutrition Coaching

Like small group personal training, you can offer small group nutritional coaching. When creating groups, it is advised to have a target audience in mind, you don't want to end up with someone who wants to lose weight in the same group as someone who wants to gain muscle mass.

You can run a few different groups initially based on interest. Some common groups that coaches start with are general weight loss, women's health, and men's health.

Coaches commonly run a group program for anywhere from six to twelve weeks with a set plan each week for success. The most successful programs teach the clients new habits each week, help them reach their individual goals, and incorporate accountability.

The accountability is most important for clients. Knowing they are accountable to the new habits they are forming will lead them to success. Without that accountability, the chance of them completing the program decreases. That accountability can be in many different forms, such as an accountability partner, to the group in a discussion format, or to you, the fitness professional.

You can then create levels to your groups. As clients progress, they can then move to the next appropriate coaching group for their goals.

3. Create a Nutrition Challenge

Nutrition challenges are not only fun for clients but also help them achieve their goals and bring you more coaching clients.

Ideally, you will want 20-30 participants to make your challenge a success. You can run this either in your gym or online, or even a mixture of both.

You will need to do some planning and create a marketing strategy for success. Include marketing both in your gym and on social media. It's also important to include some sort of prize in that strategy. The prize can be anything from cash to free services to even getting a sponsor to provide the prize.

Next, choose the timeframe of your challenge based on your marketing strategy. This can range anywhere from 1-6 months. The length of your challenge should determine the entry fee—the longer the challenge, the greater the entry fee.

It's also important for the participants to understand what's in it for them. Each week your participants should learn new habits and have weekly accountability. When your participants see success towards their goals, you will be surprised how many of them will then continue with either a group or individual nutritional coaching.

4. Offer Nutrition-Only Coaching

As a coach you know there are always the people that will come up to you in the gym with “a quick question on nutrition.” Most of those questions are not just a quick question and require more of a coaching consult to be able to answer them effectively.

When this happens it's a great opportunity to market yourself for nutritional coaching. You can do this without the person even realizing that you are “selling” your services. Use this chance to do some [motivational interviewing](#). Finding out what their goals are and what has been holding them back from getting there. Then give them a quick tip or habit that they can implement and follow up with them to see how it's going. You will be surprised how far that can take you and how easy it can be to earn yourself a new client!

5. Work with Corporate Groups

Finally, one area that coaches simply don't take advantage of enough is coaching corporate groups. To see success in this area it really comes down to networking and marketing your expertise.

Corporate health and wellness are growing rapidly and that includes nutritional coaching. A great place to start is to chat with your clients. See who they know that might be looking for someone to come in and work with their staff on nutritional coaching.

Corporate groups can often be easier to coordinate, with companies usually doing the organizing and then you get to simply coach the employees. This setting is a great place to use your nutritional challenges. You can offer them multiple time per year and the company will typically provide the prize for employees.

Corporate wellness is an area that sometimes gets forgotten by coaches but can be very profitable and simple to manage.

All these options are quick and easy to implement into your personal training business. If you are not yet certified in nutrition, you will want to take that step first before marketing your services. Maximize your career and help clients achieve their goals.

Start an Online Nutrition Coaching Business



Overall wellness is the result of diet and activity. Balanced, holistic nutrition is something we learn about in school and strive to keep up as adults. However, most adults don't truly understand what balanced nutrition is or how to achieve it for optimal health. When made aware of the benefits of sound nutrition and the services available, some people enlist the help of dietitians and nutritionists to help with meal plans and health coaching.

The [qualities of a good nutrition coach](#) include investing in your own success and gearing your services to your client's specific needs. If you have what it takes, let the games begin! To break into online nutrition consulting, these are the things you need to know to become a successful health coach with an online private practice.

The Importance of Nutrition for Health and Wellness

There are six essential nutrients everyone needs to be in optimal health as outlined by the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#).

1. **Vitamins:** Those such as A, D, E, K, and B that often come from fruits and vegetables aid in digestion and support immune health, brain function, eyesight, bone growth, and metabolism.
2. **Minerals:** Calcium, sodium, iron, copper, and potassium balance water, strengthen bones and teeth, and are a large part of blood and the circulatory system.
3. **Protein:** You'll find this in meats, dairy, and nuts and legumes. It functions as a source of energy as well as the building blocks of muscle, skin, hair, and the skeletal system.
4. **Fat:** This can be saturated (bad) or unsaturated (good) and is found in nuts, fatty fish like salmon, oils, and seeds. Fats are necessary for hormone production, digestion and absorption, brain function, and the functions of blood in the body.
5. **Carbohydrates:** These supply an energy source for the brain and most body tissues. They break down to sugar molecules in the body and exist in grains, vegetables, fruits, and many processed foods (often in the form of simple sugars).
6. **Water:** This is essential for all life on earth and humans are no different! Every cell in the body needs water to function and it aids in digestion, lubricates joints, and cleanses the body.

As a nutrition coach, you know all about these six vital components of a good diet and you have a good understanding of what a nutrition coach actually does. You will help people examine their current diet, make substitutions and better choices, teach behavior change and life skills, and adjust the plans based on results and the client's goal. There is not a single person a nutrition coach cannot help, from the elderly to the most experienced athlete!

The Credentials

To begin your online business, you need the knowledge you will then share with your clients. The minimum credential needed to be a reputable nutrition coach is a certification. ISSA offers a comprehensive [nutrition certification](#) that makes nutrition simple to understand and explain! Most students complete the certification and exam in 8-10 weeks and are fully prepared to work with any client.

For those who wish to become a registered dietitian, the education requirement is more in-depth. The initial certification will get the ball rolling, but a bachelor's degree in dietetics or nutrition is the next step. Many will also pursue an online master's degree in dietetics before pursuing the required pre-exam internship requirements and taking the registered dietitian exam. Depending on the state, the master's degree may be required.

What's the Difference?

Dietitians and nutritionists have essentially the same scope of practice. Both are educated professionals with the same aim of working towards optimal health. There are some cases where a nutritionist is not credentialed, and it is up to the client to ask for and verify someone's background. Only dietitians must take a state or national exam through the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) to verify their extensive education. The "best option" will be based on what your desired job is and what level of education you wish to pursue.

Once credentialed, you can now begin the process of setting up your online business!

License Your Name and Business

Step one, choose a business name to identify you and your services. It seems simple, but you'll want a name that is memorable and reflective of YOU! It can be based on the clients you wish to attract, the type of eating you encourage, or even include your name. Also, you can create a logo to begin your branding as well.

Contact your local Small Business Association (SBA) and find out what, if any, business licenses are needed to work online from where you are. In many cases, online businesses are not subject to state or local taxes or licenses, but it is better to verify.

Establish your business LLC so you can work. The LLC is designed to register your business and provide legal protections for you personally. Do not skip this step! Typically, you can complete this online and it costs between \$50 and \$400 depending on the state.

Defining Your Services

With the business forms completed, you can now determine your services offered as well as your business and communication policies. With an online business, you will communicate exclusively through electronic means and, potentially, telephone. Business policies like how and when you will communicate, the frequency of your

check-ins, and how and when you accept payment are important to define and make all clients aware of. List expectations for yourself and your clients upfront.

When it comes to your services, consider what type of program you'll offer:

- Is it a monthly recurring program or a one-time program that can be renewed?
- How will clients submit their food logs to you? How often will they do this?
- Do you offer different programs based on lifestyle or activity level?
- What happens when someone is noncompliant?
- Are there different levels to your program?
- Will you offer newsletters or other benefits to clients?

Branding is King When Promoting a Business

Now, develop a website and email address. You need to have a way to reach and engage with clients. On your site, you'll detail your contact information, services and pricing, testimonials, important resources, and more about you and your experience. Many sites will help you set up a welcoming, custom website. But best of all, ISSA members get a free website to support their fitness trainer careers online. Multiple pages of professionally designed, easily editable, fully hosted content is included.

Establish your social media and public-facing media to do outreach and communicate with current and potential clients. Keep your communications light-hearted, informational, and positive. Collect client testimonials early and often to share online. Your client's successes will speak to your expertise! Posting on social media like Facebook and Instagram while using appropriate and wide-reaching hashtags will drive views and clicks for your site as well.

As you brand and market your online services, consider partnering with local gyms or fitness- and health-related businesses to spread the word and reach the networks they have already established. Grassroots marketing can be slower to develop and include ideas like:

- Distribute flyers and business cards
- Social media—everyone has it!
- Create a YouTube channel and post informational videos
- Hold giveaways and contests
- Partner with local charities
- Write guest posts for other online companies
- Find someone of influence to work with and have promote your services
- Contact the local news channel (they have tv and online opportunities!)
- Host in-person clinics or forums
- Decorate your vehicle

Other Considerations

Any new business will have a cost associated with setting it up and getting it running. Your new online business will have potential fees associated with LLC and business licenses, business cards and promotional material, and marketing. If your services use a specific app or online tool, there may be a cost associated with that.

Outside of the cost of business, consider the fact that everything in the fitness industry is seasonal. January 1 through mid-spring is typically the busiest time of the year in fitness and nutrition while the last three months of the year are often the slowest. Prepare for the ebbs and flows by marketing consistently and staying organized!

The Table is Set for Success!

Without food and water, we cannot survive. When people learn how to fuel themselves effectively to promote optimal fitness and health, it is a tool for empowerment and fulfillment. Teaching people about healthful eating is a rewarding career that is never going to go away, so grab your place at the table!

Are you a nutrition coach yet? What are you waiting for?! It's easy to get certified when you study online at your own pace.