

Nutrition Education Assistants' Guide for Teaching Nutrition

MyPyramid and MyPlate are the dietary standard for normal nutrition throughout the lifecycle. The pyramid also serves as the foundation for modified diets for individuals with special dietary needs who are under a physician's care. **NEAS should discuss special diet needs of participants with their supervising Extension Educator or Area Coordinator before providing any nutrition information.**

Types of Information NEAs are Trained to Give:

NEAs provide consumer information to help homemakers select and prepare healthy foods. This information may also be valuable for homemakers whose special dietary needs make it necessary to change their food purchasing and preparation practices.

1. Reading and understanding food labels to find needed nutrition and ingredient information.
2. Methods for selecting and preparing foods that comply with dietary guidelines-especially moderation of fat, calories, sodium, and cholesterol.
3. Understanding portion sizes of foods.
4. How to follow a recipe. Extension Educators or Area Coordinators may provide assistance with identifying reliable sources of recipes for special diets.
5. Preparing salt-free and sugar free foods at home.
6. Identifying foods that are high or low in calories; fat; saturated fat; cholesterol; dietary fiber; sugar; minerals such as iron, potassium, and sodium; and vitamins such as A or C.

Types of Information NEAs Should NEVER Give:

Physicians and other professionals (dietitian, therapist, pharmacist, etc.) involved in patient care assume liability if the total care plan proves to be harmful to the patient. For this reason, health care professionals carry malpractice insurance.

NEAs who give dietary advice to a person who is on a **physician-prescribed diet** may, by her actions, include herself in the implied responsibilities **and liabilities** of the total care plan. In other words, she could be subject to a lawsuit.

1. **Never** give a diet prescription or prescribe a care plan.
2. **Never** make changes to a diet prescription provided by the physician and/or dietitian.
3. **Never** provide dietary advice for someone who is complaining of symptoms such as diarrhea, constipation, indigestion, lack of appetite, dehydration, shakiness, hyperactivity, etc. These could be symptoms of serious medical conditions requiring medical treatment.
4. **Never** provide lists of foods high or low in unusual food components; for example, oxalates, salicates, or pressor amines.

When dealing with special diet questions, refer individuals to the following professionals:

- ❖ The physician who prescribed the diet
- ❖ Other physicians in the area
- ❖ A registered dietitian associated with the county health department
- ❖ Other registered dietitians in the vicinity

Contact the State CNEP Nutrition Education Specialist if you have any questions.