

 **DEFINING NUTRITIONAL THERAPY**



## What is Nutritional Therapy ?

- Nutritional Therapy is the application of nutrition and health science to enable individuals to maximise their health potential.
- The external and internal environments of the individual are altered through diet, nutraceuticals, functional foods, nutritional supplements and detoxification. Individuals are educated to make the necessary changes relating to their environment and lifestyle to help alleviate or prevent chronic health problems and to promote optimal health.
- Nutritional Therapists follow a holistic approach by 'treating the whole person'. They recognise that each person is an individual who has unique dietary and nutritional requirements. Individual prescriptions for diet, supplementation and lifestyle are based on medical, family and dietary histories and practitioners develop a diagnostic insight specific to this modality.



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- Nutritional Therapy is part of an integrated approach to health. Nutritional Therapists aim to work synergistically with other health care practitioners to benefit the patient.
  - Nutritional Therapy can be characterised by its
    - drug-free nature
    - overall respect for the inherent vitality of cells and tissues and the body's ability to heal itself
    - support for active biological processes that prevent health problems, rather than using inhibitory methods that tend to mask problems
    - appropriate use of optimal supplementary nutrients to maximise an individual's functionality and health
    - recognition of the extent to which nutrition of the brain affects mental health
    - acknowledgement of the emotional state of the patient and encouraging positive attitude
    - acknowledgement of the WHO definition: HEALTH - "A state of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing and not just the absence of disease".

- A Nutritional Therapist competent in clinical nutrition understands the following:
  - the human biochemistry of both micro- and macronutrients
  - how nutrition influences pH, electrolytes, intercellular communication and blood sugar control
  - human bioenergetics
  - nutritional influence on membrane composition and receptor function
  - clinical signs and symptoms of nutritionally related disorders
  - biochemical and laboratory findings related to nutrient excesses / insufficiencies
  - molecular genetics and how nutrition influences its expression. (1)
- Clinical Nutrition, Optimum Nutrition, Functional Medicine, Integrated Medicine, Nutritional Medicine, Orthomolecular Medicine, Bio-molecular and Clinical Ecology are terms associated with Nutritional Therapy.
- Nutritional Therapy is a distinct discipline. Nutrition advice, not to be confused with Nutritional Therapy, is part of other disciplines such as: Dietetics, Naturopathy, Homeopathy, Phytotherapy, Allopathic Medicine and other health-related disciplines, as nutrition is the foundation of health.



## How does a Nutritional Therapist practise?

### Underlying principles:

✚ **Synergy:** Nutritional Therapists regard the individual as having multivariable, non-linear, differential and adaptive systems that interact in a multivariable, non-linear, differential and adaptive environment. These systems are not beyond the capability of science to describe, but it is often beyond the capability of science to explain their behaviour in all given circumstances.

Most analytical scientific methods assume a linear chain of causality that is rarely appropriate in practice. It assumes that the variance of one factor will have a negligible impact upon others in the system. This linear assumption is often deeply erroneous in highly complex, self-adaptive systems such as the human body.

Nutritional Therapists respect the current scientific method of analysis and the richness this knowledge and experience has contributed, and continues to contribute, to healthcare. However, making sound clinical applications from scientific methods is fraught with difficulty. There exists a clear limitation in the general scientific model of nutritional research, where the tendency is to measure one factor against one parameter.

✚ **Individuality:** Fundamental to the expression of health, are the genes that we have inherited from our ancestors. Over the last decade, scientists have identified more and more diseases that appear to have a genetic component. Anatomically, physiologically and biochemically we are all unique. It is likely that genetic screening will revolutionise Nutritional Therapy during the 21st century and it will become increasingly possible to further individualise nutrition programmes.

Similarly, our diet, lifestyles, environments, education and socio-economic status are unique. Nutritional Therapists are aware of the multivariate factors that obstruct individuals from

implementing appropriate nutrition and lifestyle changes, and will work with them at their own pace to adapt to new circumstances.

❖ **Toxicity:** Nutritional Therapists advise their patients how they can reduce their exposure to endogenous and exogenous pollutants and which foods to include in their diet to provide their body with an appropriate blend of nutrients to protect against unavoidable pollutants. The human body has a remarkable capacity to detoxify and heal. However, the Nutritional Therapist considers that the synthetic chemical challenges presented to the human body in the 20th century are inappropriate and unnecessarily burden detoxification pathways. The toxic accumulations within the body are best identified and then viewed in relation to their ability to inhibit the biochemical activities of cells. Understanding the roles of nutrients and foods in detoxification leads Nutritional Therapists to the development of an integrated and structured approach to the treatment of patients.

❖ **Diversity:** Nutritional Therapists encourage their patients to eat a wide and diverse range of foods to maximise intake of nutrients. Diversifying the diet also helps reduce over-exposure to common food allergens.

❖ **Balance:** There are many aspects to dietary balance that a Nutritional Therapist will consider including: acid/alkaline balance; raw to cooked foods; macronutrients, micronutrients, phytochemicals, colour and diversity.

**Digestive Health:** Digestive problems are frequently encountered in practice. Improving digestive processes is not always brought about by improvements in dietary intake alone. Digestive health is a fundamental pre-requisite for maximising nutrient availability for body function. Many Nutritional Therapists find it more effective to address underlying biochemical imbalances once the digestive tract is relieved of inappropriate foods, has become more receptive to the uptake of nutrients, and is able to eliminate toxins effectively.

❖ **Nutritional Screening:** As a result of advances in nutritional screening over the last two decades, the Nutritional Therapist is well equipped to evaluate nutritional status, biochemical and functional imbalances, and to monitor the efficacy of implemented nutrition programmes. In conjunction with screening for nutritional status and biochemical imbalances, the Nutritional Therapist can monitor the patient's progress throughout an intervention programme.



## **The Nutritional Therapy Consultation**

Gathering information - detailed case histories will include: family history, lifestyle, social history, past and current symptoms and diseases from conception and infancy onwards, medication history, nutritional supplement history, current and historic dietary trends and exposure to toxins. Biochemical and / or functional tests may be recommended.

Explaining findings - the Nutritional Therapist will explain the underlying factors considered integral in the patient's current state of health, based on the detailed information gathered.

Negotiating a programme - the patient is very much involved in establishing a nutrition programme that can be successfully implemented. The Nutritional Therapist will recommend a programme, which is targeted to meet the patient's individual needs. The Nutritional Therapist will help the patient work out a strategy for implementation. In addition to dietary and nutritional advice and nutrient supplementation, recommendations may include guidance on natural detoxification, dental health, methods to support digestion and absorption, procedures to promote colon health and the avoidance of ingestion or inhalation of allergens or toxins. Taking a whole system approach, these protocols improve endocrine, neurological and immune function.



Education is a major part of the consultation and frequently provides motivation and inspiration to start and sustain a programme. Many patients experience improvements in well-being quite quickly. Despite sustained improvements in health, on-going support and a sustainable progressive approach is often needed to maintain a patient's wellness. Nutritional Therapists therefore enable and encourage their patients to take personal responsibility for their own health.

Other practitioners - with permission from the patient, the Nutritional Therapist may contact other health care practitioners involved in the patient's health care in order to gather information needed to formulate a Nutritional Therapy programme, or to advise that a Nutritional Therapy programme has been recommended. The Nutritional Therapist may also refer a patient to other health care practitioners. The Nutritional Therapist will strongly advise a patient to inform other health care practitioners that they have consulted a Nutritional Therapist and are following a Nutritional Therapy programme.



## **Where do Nutritional Therapists practise?**

Nutritional Therapists frequently work in private practice. Patients come to them by self-referral, via positive reports from other patients, by referral from a consultant, medical or dental practitioner or other health professionals.

Nutritional Therapists may also work in different environments where their skills and competence are of benefit.

The activities of a Nutritional Therapist can include:

- Use of other health care disciplines such as Dietetics, Homeopathy, Reflexology, Iridology, Colon Hydrotherapy and Nursing in which they are professionally qualified and registered.
- Liaison with, and appropriate referral to, other health professionals.
- Education of the public, media and other health professionals about the importance of nutrition for human health through presentations, the provision of literature and responding to media opportunities such as magazines, radio and TV.
- Undertaking postgraduate research, Masters and PhDs to further develop the field of Nutritional Therapy.

- Carrying out Clinical Audits and sharing the findings through appropriate reports and publications.
- Contribution to academic journals through writing articles, reports and case studies.
- Teaching health and nutrition in primary, secondary and tertiary educational establishments.
- Training health food traders and other groups in industry.
- Updating professional knowledge through Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

## Reference:

1. Bland J,S. Clinical Nutrition: A Functional Approach – Preface. The Institute for Functional Medicine, 1999.

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