

Ethics Isn't Optional: Understanding and Applying the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Code of Ethics



A Complimentary Continuing Professional Education Program Self-Study Short Course

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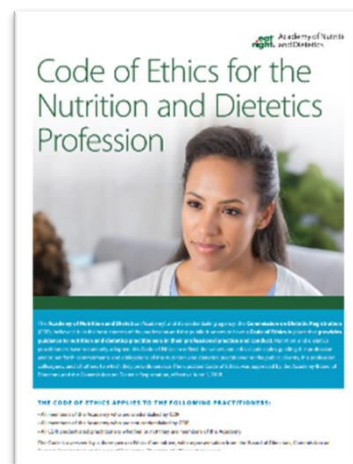
Acknowledgements

Required Reading

[Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession.](#)

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Chicago IL: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. 2018.

Disclaimer: The text associated with this course is required solely for the course taker to learn the underlying principles which they will apply in taking a case-study based exam. Neither the authors nor the publishers of the text have contributed to or endorsed this course.



Continuing Professional Education Program Self-Study Course

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Ethics Isn't Optional: Understanding and Applying the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Code of Ethics – Short Course

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Carefully review the contents of this program. Keep in mind the practical applications it has for you in your individual setting. The focus is to increase your knowledge and application of the subject matter. For multiple choice questions select the one best answer from the choices given.

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Course Expiration Date Must be completed prior to this date	Continuing Education Hours	Profession for which CPE is Intended	CDR Level	CDR CPE Type	CDR Activity Number
October 24, 2025	1	RDN NDTR	2	720	173095

Course Description

This course is based on the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics *Code of Ethics*. This Code applies to nutrition and dietetics practitioners who act in a wide variety of capacities. The Code provides general principles and specific ethical standards for situations frequently encountered in daily practice. The primary goal is the protection of the individuals, groups, organizations, communities, or populations with whom the practitioner works and interacts. *This course meets the requirements for the Commission on Dietetic Registration's required 1 CPE credit on ethics in each 5-year cycle of their Professional Development Portfolio.*

To complete this CPE, read the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics *Code of Ethics* <https://www.eatrightpro.org/-/media/eatrightpro-files/career/code-of-ethics/codeofethicshandout.pdf?la=en&hash=1DEF8BAE3548732AC47E3827D9E6326DA5AED496>. Next, review the case study below, which provides practical examples of ethical issues. Lastly, complete the Continuing Professional Education Exam and follow the instructions on page 11 of this document to obtain your CPE certificate.

Ethics Isn't Optional: Understanding and Applying the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Code of Ethics – Short Course

Course Learning Objectives

After completing this continuing education course, the learner will be able to:

1. Recognize and discloses any conflicts of interests, including any financial interests in products or services.
2. Recognize actual or potential ethical issues and dilemmas encountered in practice.
3. Use an ethical framework to guide decisions.
4. Use ethical reasoning and decision-making processes to address ethical dilemmas.

CDR Performance Indicators

- 1.2.1 Recognizes and discloses any conflicts of interests, including any financial interests in products or services.
- 1.3.1 Recognizes actual or potential ethical issues and dilemmas encountered in practice.
- 1.3.2 Uses an ethical framework to guide decisions.
- 1.3.3 Uses ethical reasoning and decision-making processes to address ethical dilemmas.

Note: Numerous other Performance Indicators may apply.

Ethics Isn't Optional: Understanding and Applying the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Code of Ethics – Short Course

Case Study

Three registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) who were in graduate school together meet monthly for lunch. Suzanne works full time in a hospital and is responsible for a medical-surgical floor. Joshua has a private practice focusing on cardiac care and contracts with a skilled nursing facility and hospice agency. Maria works in a skilled nursing facility and has food service management and clinical nutrition responsibilities. The issue of obtaining the required ethics CPE for the Commission on Dietetic Registration comes up and they begin to discuss ethical issues they have each encountered recently.

Suzanne mentions a 55-year-old male post-surgery patient who is not eating well. On admission he was 5'10" and weighed 180 pounds. In one week, his weight dropped to 165 pounds, an 8.3% weight loss. His appetite has been poor since surgery, but he is drinking fluids very well. Although he has no written advance directives on file, he told staff he does not want a tube feeding. Suzanne is concerned that his significant weight loss and poor intake may be delaying his recovery. She asks if a short-term tube feeding is an option, even though the patient does not want it. Joshua suggests using high calorie, high protein oral nutritional supplements (ONS) since the patient is drinking well.

Suzanne also mentioned that she discovered a co-worker has been backdating nutrition notes to meet the regulatory time frames for initial assessments. The co-worker told Suzanne that her case load of high-risk patients had increased, making it difficult to complete required documentation on time, and she didn't want to get the department in trouble. Suzanne asks how her colleagues would handle this situation.

Joshua has a nursing home patient who is under hospice care. The patient is declining, and he has had poor food and fluid intake and a significant weight loss in the past month. Joshua has followed the facility policy of weighing the patient weekly and has added ONS. The hospice RN case manager wants to discontinue weekly weights, but Joshua is concerned the facility might be cited for a nutrition care related deficiency during the upcoming state survey.

Joshua also shares that he is selling a new brand of nutritional supplements and is offering them as part of his recommendations for all of the cardiac patients in his private practice. The supplements are part of a multi-level marketing platform and have the potential to add to his financial bottom line, so he is excited about the possibilities.

Ethics Isn't Optional: Understanding and Applying the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Code of Ethics – Short Course

Maria mentions that her primary food service vendor asked several dietitians to be part of a focus group to sample new product offerings. The vendor will be serving new food products that will be added to the facilities' order guides and will be available for purchase. Each dietitian will receive a \$25.00 Amazon gift card for attending.

The group decides to review the most recent Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession (date June 1, 2018) and evaluate each situation. After reading the Code of Ethics, the colleagues conclude:

Tube Feeding vs. Supplement Use for Suzanne's Hospital Patient

Suzanne should educate the patient about the need for adequate nutrition post-surgery, share her concerns (from an evidence-based perspective) about his significant weight loss and recovery, and outline options available including short-term tube feeding and/or use of ONS. However, Suzanne should remember that her patient has the right to refuse treatment. The Code of Ethics requires practitioners to respect patient's autonomy and decision making about their personal health (Section 2.h.). If the patient refuses tube feeding, Suzanne must respect that decision. She should follow the facility's guidelines for obtaining each patient's choices and updating their advance directives. She should make note of these preferences in her progress notes.

Suzanne's Hospital Co-Worker Back Dating Notes

The Code of Ethics requires practitioners to refrain from communicating false, deceptive, or misleading statements (3.d) and information that does not accurately reflect the character of services that were delivered (2.g). Backdating notes is considered falsification of information, could be a legal issue, and violates several principles of the Code of Ethics. Suzanne needs to discuss the situation with the co-worker and discuss options on how to handle this situation with integrity. One way is to document notes as a "late entry". However, the regular use of "late entries" raises questions about professional ethics and time management. Further investigation is needed to work through the correct approach to ethical decision-making in this situation. The lack of adequate staffing to provide care within established time frames needs to be addressed with management.

Joshua's Nursing Home/Hospice Patient's Weights

The Code of Ethics requires practitioners to act in a caring and respectful manner (1.g) and make evidence-based decisions, considering unique patient circumstances (1.e). Weighing patients at the end of life provides no useful information and can be uncomfortable and disruptive. With permission of the patient and/or family, weights can be discontinued to maintain the individual's comfort and dignity. Joshua should

Ethics Isn't Optional: Understanding and Applying the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Code of Ethics – Short Course

document the decision to discontinue weights in the medical record and care plan. He should also consult with the patient, family, and/or staff regarding food and beverage preferences and direct the food service department to provide those items as tolerated.

Joshua's Supplement Sales

The Code of Ethics calls for practitioners to disclose any conflicts of interest, including any financial interests in products or services that are recommended (2.a). Joshua is in violation of the Code because he is selling the supplements to all of his patients and not disclosing his financial arrangement with the multi-level marketing company.

Supplement sales are not necessarily a Code of Ethics violation if they are done with transparency, as is outlined by the Academy's *Guidelines Regarding the Recommendation and Sale of Dietary Supplements*

([https://www.jandonline.org/article/S2212-2672\(20\)30453-6/fulltext](https://www.jandonline.org/article/S2212-2672(20)30453-6/fulltext)). By making some changes to reveal information about his financial gain and/or relationship with supplement manufacturers, Joshua may be able to ethically sell supplements in his private practice.

Gift Card

The use of industry focus groups by vendors is a common practice to obtain information and meet customers' needs. The small value of the gift card may not raise ethical concerns however the Code of Ethics calls for refraining from accepting gifts or services which could potentially influence or which may give the appearance of influencing professional judgment (2.a). It is important to be aware of the perception that accepting gifts could create. Maria should check her company policy because it may prohibit accepting the gift card. In some cases, using the gift card to benefit the facility or department (rather than the individual) is expected. *It should be noted that it may not be considered more ethical to accept money for the department or facility rather than for an individual.*

References:

1. Peregrin T. Revisions to the Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession. *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2018;118:1764-1767.
[https://jandonline.org/article/S2212-2672\(18\)30863-3/pdf](https://jandonline.org/article/S2212-2672(18)30863-3/pdf). Accessed June 9, 2022.
2. Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession.
<https://www.eatrightpro.org/-/media/eatrightpro-files/career/code-of-ethics/codeofethicshandout.pdf?la=en&hash=1DEF8BAE3548732AC47E3827D9E6326DA5AED496>. Accessed June 9, 2022.

Ethics Isn't Optional: Understanding and Applying the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Code of Ethics – Short Course

3. Thomson C, Diekman C, Sarubin-Fragakis A, Meerschaert C, Holler H, Devlin C. Guidelines Regarding the Recommendation and Sale of Dietary Supplements. *J Acad Nutr Diet.* 2002;102;1158-1164. doi:10.1016/S0002-8223(02)90257-9.

Ethics Isn't Optional: Understanding and Applying the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Code of Ethics – Short Course

Continuing Professional Education Self-Assessment Test

1. Suzanne wants to recommend a short-term tube feeding for a patient who stated he did not want tube feeding. What is the primary reason why she should identify her perceptions and values related to the issue?
 - a. To ensure that the facility is not cited in a survey for untreated weight loss.
 - b. To ensure that her decision is consistent with and supports her personal values.
 - c. To ensure her actions are consistent with the facility's advance directives policies.
 - d. To ensure that her values do not interfere with the patient's right to autonomy.

2. The discovery that a co-worker is back-dating notes violates which standard in the Code of Ethics?
 - a. Engage in service that benefits the community and to enhance the public's trust in the profession.
 - b. Refrain from communicating false, fraudulent, deceptive, misleading, disparaging or unfair statements or claims.
 - c. Maintain and appropriately use credentials.
 - d. Practice within the limits of their scope and collaborate with the inter-professional team.

3. When deciding to discontinue weekly weights in a hospice patient, what steps should Joshua take to support his decision?
 - a. Do not mention weights to avoid drawing a surveyor's attention to the issue.
 - b. Document in the medical record why weekly weights were discontinued.
 - c. Continue to reference the patient's most recent weight in reassessments.
 - d. Exclude the patient or family in discussions about weight.

Ethics Isn't Optional: Understanding and Applying the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Code of Ethics – Short Course

4. Maria considers whether to participate in a vendor-sponsored focus group dinner for which she will receive a small gift card. What issue would be important to consider in order to make the best decision ethically?
 - a. Her professional reputation and competence in food service.
 - b. Cultural influences affecting her decision making.
 - c. Should she develop strategies to avoid similar situations from recurring in the future?
 - d. Is she accepting a gift that could influence her purchasing decisions?

5. In the case study presented, which of the following scenarios presents a violation of the Code of Ethics?
 - a. Maria attending a focus group that provides dinner.
 - b. Joshua selling supplements to all of his cardiac patients.
 - c. Joshua discontinuing weekly weights for hospice patient.
 - d. Susanna recommending an oral supplement for patient with weight loss.