

# **Ethics In Action: Applying the Academy Code of Ethics**

Continuing Professional Education  
Self-Study Course



*Becky Dorner*  
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# **Ethics in Action: Applying the Academy Code of Ethics**

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# Ethics in Action: Applying the Academy Code of Ethics

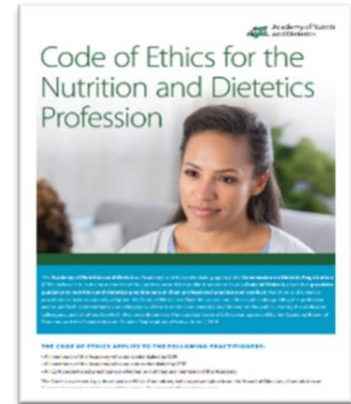
## Acknowledgements

## Publication Information

### Required Reading

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

Chicago IL: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. 2018.



This pdf document also has some additional information on decision making that is helpful:

<https://www.eatrightpro.org/-/media/files/eatrightpro/practice/code-of%20ethics/codeofethicshandout.pdf?rev=831aac4f9288461483f9234284833fce>

Disclaimer: The required reading material 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 required reading have contributed to or endorsed this course.

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### Disclosures

The individuals responsible for the planning, development, and creation of this continuing professional education (CPE) activity certify that no conflicts of interest exist for the content of this educational activity.

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## **Professional Approvals**

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We maintain records of course completions for a period of 7 years.

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This course and test must be completed prior to the expiration date. To obtain your continuing education certificate, you must review the material including required reading, take and pass an online test, and complete a simple evaluation.

You may re-take the online test as many times as needed prior to the expiration date. If you are interrupted and cannot finish the test, you can save the test and come back later to finish it.

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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<b>Course Expiration Date</b> Must be completed prior to this date	<b>Continuing Professional Education Hours</b>	<b>Profession for which CPE is Intended</b>	<b>CDR Learning Level</b>	<b>CDR CPEU Type</b>	<b>CDR Activity Number</b>
<b>September 24, 2028</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>RDN NDTR</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>741</b>	<b>190096</b>

*Ethics Isn't Optional: Understanding and Applying the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Code of Ethics - Short Course awards 1.0 CPEUS in accordance with the Commission on Dietetic Registration's CPEU Prior Approval Program.*

**\*Please note this course has also been approved for the required 1 ethics CPEU.**

**The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (Academy) and Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) are not responsible for the provider's interpretation of the Academy/CDR Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession or its enforcement as it relates to the scenarios and content presented in this activity.**

### **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 work or interact 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.

To complete this course, read the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics *Code of Ethics* <https://www.eatrightpro.org/practice/code-of-ethics/code-of-ethics-for-the-nutrition-and-dietetics-profession>. This pdf document also has some additional information on decision making that is helpful: <https://www.eatrightpro.org/-/media/files/eatrightpro/practice/code-of-ethics/codeofethicshandout.pdf?rev=831aac4f9288461483f9234284833fce>.

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 4 of this document to obtain your CPE certificate.

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## **Course Learning Objectives**

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

1. Recognize and disclose any conflicts of interest, 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.**

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### **Case Study**

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

Suzanne mentions a 55-year-old male who is post-surgery and 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 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 coworker has been backdating nutrition notes to meet the regulatory time frames for initial assessments. The coworker told Suzanne that her caseload of patients who are high-risk had increased, making it difficult to complete the 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 resident in a skilled nursing facility whose health is declining and who was recently placed on hospice care. He has had poor food and fluid intake and a significant weight loss in the past month. Joshua followed the facility policy of weighing the resident weekly and has added ONS. The hospice RN case manager would like to discontinue the weekly weights. Joshua is concerned that 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 patients with heart disease 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.

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

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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 the following.

### **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 the available options, 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 a 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 Coworker 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 talk with her coworker about the situation and discuss options on how to handle this 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 Resident on Skilled Nursing and Hospice Care (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 obtain the patient's (or family's permission if the patient is unable to make their own decisions) and document the decision to discontinue weights in the medical record including the care plan. Joshua should also consult with the patient, family, and/or staff regarding



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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 of Ethics* 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 for obtaining information and meeting 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 that could potentially influence or 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. *However, accepting money for the department or facility may not be considered more ethical than accepting it 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://jandonlin.org/article/S2212-2672\(18\)30863-3/pdf](https://jandonlin.org/article/S2212-2672(18)30863-3/pdf). Accessed July 9, 2025.
2. Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession. <https://www.eatrightpro.org/practice/code-of-ethics/code-of-ethics-for-the-nutrition-and-dietetics-profession>. Accessed July 16, 2025.
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.

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## 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 coworker is back-dating notes violates which standard in the *Code of Ethics*?
  - a. Engage in service that benefits the community and enhances 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 patient under hospice care, 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.
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?

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

Joel (he/him), is a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) who is starting a blog to attract clients to his private practice. He often uses artificial intelligence (AI) to create his social media posts. Due to being pressed for time, he creates an AI document and immediately posts it without review. An RDN colleague, Kaylen (she/her), notices that the post includes recommendations for Vitamin D that are not scientifically correct. She informs Joel by making a scathing remark in the social media post.

6. What ethics violation did Joel violate?
- Communicating false or misleading statements or claims.
  - Violating copyright laws by using AI-generated content.
  - There is no ethical issue as long as the information is generally accurate.
  - Failing to promote fairness and equitable treatment of his followers.
7. What ethics violation did Kaylen violate?
- Providing biased performance evaluations for Joel.
  - Making fraudulent claims against Joel on a social media post.
  - Failure to respect and include constructive dialogue in social media posts.
  - Failure to provide accurate information in a social media post.

Monique (she/her), a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN), serves on a task force launching a "Healthy Vending" initiative in public schools in partnership with a major food company, which is replacing sugary snacks with fortified bars and beverages. Although the products meet basic nutrition standards, Monique is concerned because they are highly processed and culturally irrelevant to the diverse student population. When she raises these issues, the task force chair dismisses them, saying they need her endorsement to lend credibility and that "it's better than nothing." Monique struggles with whether supporting the program aligns with her ethical obligation to promote fairness, equity, and public trust in the profession.

8. What is the most ethically appropriate course of action for Monique?
- Publicly endorse the program since it meets minimal nutritional standards.
  - Decline to participate and withdraw from the task force entirely.
  - Endorse the campaign even though she feels that the options are not culturally appropriate.
  - Suggest more equitable, culturally appropriate options and endorse the campaign if they're included.