

Nutritionist interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for nutritionist roles typically blend a conversation about your approach with practical scenarios. Employers want to see how you assess clients, educate them and work within scope.

- **Process and caseload:** Questions about how you structure assessments, develop plans and manage a client load.
- **Behavioural:** Questions asking for real examples of client work, teamwork or adapting to challenges.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Hypothetical situations that test how you respond to tricky client requests or ethical dilemmas.
- **Technical knowledge:** Questions on nutrition science, dietary guidelines and how you keep your knowledge current.
- **Client communication and education:** Questions about explaining nutrition to diverse audiences and supporting behaviour change.

The process often starts with a phone screen, then an in-person or video interview with a panel that may include a dietitian, practice manager or community health coordinator. Some employers include a short case study or ask you to review a sample food diary. You might also be asked to demonstrate how you would run an education session.

1. Walk me through how you assess a new client's dietary habits and health goals.

Why they ask

This shows your process, from building rapport to gathering data and setting goals.

How to structure your answer

Use a step-by-step walk-through. Start with the initial conversation, then describe the tools you use, how you analyse findings, and how you involve the client in planning.

Example answer

"I start by asking open-ended questions about what a typical day of eating looks like, using a 24-hour recall as a starting point. Then I move to a food frequency questionnaire to get a broader picture. I also ask about medical history, medications, cultural foods, cooking skills and budget. Once I have that, I enter the data into FoodWorks to check nutrient intake against the Australian Dietary Guidelines. I don't just hand over a plan; I discuss what I've found with the client and we set two or three realistic goals together. For example, if someone skips breakfast and relies on vending machine snacks, we might start with a grab-and-go breakfast option they can keep at work."

2. Tell me about a time you had to adapt a nutrition plan because a client wasn't making progress.

Why they ask

This tests your flexibility, problem-solving and ability to keep clients engaged.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR. Describe the situation and the client's barrier, the task of getting them back on track, the action you took, and the result.

Example answer

"I had a client with type 2 diabetes who wasn't seeing changes in her blood sugar levels after six weeks. She was following the meal plan but felt hungry and was snacking on biscuits in the afternoon. I realised the plan was too low in protein and fibre for her. I reviewed her food diary and we added a mid-afternoon snack with Greek yoghurt and nuts, and increased vegetables at lunch. I also checked in with her weekly instead of fortnightly. Over the next month, her hunger settled, she stopped the biscuit snacking, and her next GP review showed better readings."

3. A client comes to you wanting to lose weight quickly by following a very restrictive diet. How do you handle that?

Why they ask

This looks at your judgement, ethics and ability to educate without lecturing.

How to structure your answer

Explain your approach under pressure. Acknowledge the client's goal, then describe how you would assess safety, provide evidence-based information, and negotiate a safer alternative.

Example answer

"I would start by acknowledging their motivation and asking why they want to lose weight quickly. I'd explain that very restrictive diets can lead to muscle loss, nutrient deficiencies and rebound eating, and that the evidence favours gradual changes. I'd offer to work with them on a plan that still moves towards their goal but includes enough food groups to meet their nutrient needs. If they insisted on the restrictive approach, I'd document our conversation and suggest they see their GP or an Accredited Practising Dietitian for medical supervision. I'd also offer to support them with a more moderate plan whenever they're ready."

4. What are the key differences between the Australian Dietary Guidelines and popular fad diets, and how do you communicate that to clients?

Why they ask

This checks your technical knowledge and your ability to translate it into plain language.

How to structure your answer

Compare and contrast. Outline the guidelines' principles, then pick one or two common fad diets, and finish with how you explain the differences to a client without jargon.

Example answer

"The Australian Dietary Guidelines are based on decades of evidence and focus on overall patterns: plenty of vegetables and fruit, wholegrains, lean proteins, and limited discretionary foods. They don't ban entire food groups. Fad diets often do, whether it's cutting out carbs or dairy, and they can be hard to sustain. When I talk to clients, I don't lecture them about fad diets. I ask what they've tried and what worked. Then I explain that the guidelines are flexible and can include foods they enjoy. I might use a plate model to show how to build meals, which is easier to remember than a list of rules."

5. How do you explain complex nutrition information to someone with low health literacy?

Why they ask

This assesses your communication skills and empathy.

How to structure your answer

Describe your teaching approach. Use plain language, visual aids, and check for understanding.

Example answer

"I avoid jargon like 'micronutrients' or 'glycaemic index' unless I define them. I use everyday words and pictures. For example, instead of saying 'increase your fibre intake', I might say 'try to add a handful of vegetables to your dinner plate' or show a picture of what a serve looks like. I also use the teach-back method: I ask the client to tell me in their own words what they'll do this week. If they can't,

I explain it again differently. I keep written handouts simple, with large font and tick boxes, so they have something to refer to at home."

6. How do you handle a client who asks for advice outside your scope of practice, such as prescribing supplements?

Why they ask

This tests your professionalism and understanding of boundaries.

How to structure your answer

Explain your process for staying within scope. Describe how you would respond, refer, and document.

Example answer

"I would explain that as a nutritionist, I can advise on food and diet, but prescribing supplements is outside my scope unless I have specific additional training. I'd suggest they speak to their GP or an Accredited Practising Dietitian who can assess their needs and check for interactions with any medications. If it's a simple case, like a client asking about a multivitamin, I might discuss food sources of those nutrients instead. I always document the conversation and the referral in my notes, so there's a clear record."