

# ACE Position Statement on Nutrition Scope of Practice for Exercise Professionals and Health Coaches

It is the position of the American Council on Exercise (ACE) that exercise professionals and health coaches not only can but should share general nonmedical nutrition information with their clients/participants.

In the current climate of an epidemic of obesity, poor nutrition, and physical inactivity paired with a multibillion dollar diet industry and a strong interest among the general public in improving eating habits and increasing physical activity, exercise professionals and health coaches are on the front lines in helping the public to achieve healthier lifestyles. Exercise professionals and health coaches provide an essential service to their clients/participants, the industry, and the community at large when they are able to offer credible, practical, and relevant nutrition information to clients/participants while staying within their professional scope of practice.

Ultimately, an individual exercise professional's or health coach's scope of practice as it relates to nutrition is determined by state policies and regulations, education and experience, and competencies and skills. While this implies that the nutrition-related scope of practice may vary among exercise professionals, there are certain actions that are within the scope of practice for all exercise professionals.

For example, it is within the scope of practice for all exercise professionals to share dietary advice endorsed or developed by the federal government, especially the Dietary Guidelines for Americans ([www.dietaryguidelines.gov](http://www.dietaryguidelines.gov)) and the MyPlate recommendations ([www.myplate.gov](http://www.myplate.gov)).

Exercise professionals and health coaches who hold a current certification from a program with accreditation from the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), or the International Organization for Standardization (ISO)/International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) ("ISO/IEC 17024"), such as those provided by ACE, and those who have undertaken nutrition continuing education, should also be prepared to discuss:

- ▶ Principles of healthy nutrition and food preparation
- ▶ Food to be included in the balanced daily diet
- ▶ Essential nutrients needed by the body
- ▶ Actions of nutrients on the body
- ▶ Effects of deficiencies or excesses of nutrients
- ▶ How nutrient requirements vary through the lifecycle
- ▶ Information about nutrients contained in foods or supplements

Exercise professionals and health coaches may share this information through a variety of venues, including cooking demonstrations, recipe exchanges, development of handouts and informational packets, individual or group classes and seminars, or one-on-one encounters.

# ACE Position Statement on Nutrition Scope of Practice for Exercise Professionals and Health Coaches

Exercise professionals and health coaches who do not feel comfortable sharing this information are strongly encouraged to undergo continuing education to further develop nutrition competency and skills and to develop relationships with registered dietitians or other qualified health professionals who can provide this information. It is within the exercise professional's scope of practice to distribute and disseminate information or programs that have been developed by a registered dietitian or medical doctor.

The actions that are outside the scope of practice for exercise professionals and health coaches include, but may not be limited to, the following:

- ▶ Individualized nutrition recommendations or meal planning other than that which is available through government guidelines and recommendations, or has been developed and endorsed by a registered dietitian or physician
- ▶ Nutritional assessment to determine nutritional needs and nutritional status, and to recommend nutritional intake
- ▶ Specific recommendations or programming for nutrient or nutritional intake, caloric intake, or specialty diets
- ▶ Nutritional counseling, education, or advice aimed to prevent, treat, or cure a disease or condition, or other acts that may be perceived as medical nutrition therapy
- ▶ Development, administration, evaluation, and consultation regarding nutritional care standards or the nutrition care process
- ▶ Recommending, prescribing, selling, or supplying nutritional supplements to clients/participants
- ▶ Promotion or identification of oneself as a "nutritionist" or "dietitian"

Engaging in these activities can place a client's/participant's health and safety at risk and possibly expose the exercise professional or health coach to disciplinary action and litigation. To ensure maximal client/participant safety and compliance with state policies and laws, it is essential that the exercise professional or health coach recognize when it is appropriate to refer to a registered dietitian or physician. ACE recognizes that some fitness and health clubs encourage or require their employees to sell nutritional supplements. If this is a condition of employment, ACE suggests that exercise professionals and health coaches:

- ▶ Obtain complete scientific understanding regarding the safety and efficacy of the supplement from qualified healthcare professionals and/or credible resources. Note: Generally, the Office of Dietary Supplements ([ods.od.nih.gov](https://ods.od.nih.gov)), the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine ([nccam.nih.gov](https://nccam.nih.gov)), and the Food and Drug Administration ([FDA.gov](https://fda.gov)) are reliable places to go to examine the validity of the claims as well as risks and benefits associated with taking a particular supplement. Since the sites are from trusted resources and in the public domain, exercise professionals and health coaches can freely distribute and share the information contained on these sites.
- ▶ Stay up to-date on the legal and/or regulatory issues related to the use of the supplement and its individual ingredients.
- ▶ Obtain adequate insurance coverage should a problem arise.