

Career Profile

Caroline Valeriote, Registered Dietician

Caroline Valeriote graduated from the University of Guelph with a Bachelor of Applied Science degree. Later, she went on to receive her certificate in administrative dietetics, or 'certificate of internship' from Brantford General Hospital. In 1993, she graduated from Wilfrid Laurier University with a diploma in Business Administration. Caroline worked clinically



as a Registered Dietician for 10 years at St. Mary's General Hospital in Kitchener. Here, she had a wide variety of responsibilities including cardiology, general medicine and general surgery. In this role, Caroline interacted with patients to develop their nutrition treatment plan. She taught weekly cardio health classes and provided nutrition guidance on various other clinical treatment recommendations. Her completion of media training courses also allowed her to expand into areas of public nutrition communication and media communications.

Caroline eventually decided to open her own private practice and pursue individual contracts. Most notably, she took on a 14-year contract in prenatal nutrition with the Waterloo Region Public Health Unit. In addition to prenatal, Caroline has fulfilled contracts in areas of long-term health, recipe development, book reviews with the Toronto Star, and private health and wellness organizations. Caroline has been an active volunteer through her life, from general health and wellness education, to roles with the Heart & Stroke foundation, Eating Disorders Awareness Coalition, as well as serving on the board of directors for the KW YMCA.

Caroline decided on this career at only 10 years old. After participating in an introductory information kiosk at a small mall in Guelph she was immediately interested and went on to attend open houses and pursue the path of study in high school. There are a few universities in Ontario and across Canada that offer the Bachelor of Applied Science or Applied Human Nutrition. This four-year degree encompasses a wide variety of course selections, dealing specifically with nutrition and health in third and fourth years. Generally, when you graduate from this degree program you have to apply for an internship. After completion of this 10 month to one-year intense program, individuals will branch out into administrative, general or clinical work. An additional, newer avenue is attending a university that offers a masters in combination with an internship. Finally, competency exams must be written in order to apply for The College of Dieticians of Ontario. Registered dieticians must be members of the college and meet the required competencies. Caroline notes that the title nutritionist is, in contrast, a very loose term and is not title protected.

Caroline is typically in charge of her own scheduling as she works for herself and runs her own business. She tries to gear her schedule around prioritizing her greatest responsibilities. Generally, she fulfills her contract with Laurier's Wellness Centre for the majority of the day, attending nutritional counselling appointments. In addition, she works from her home office to fulfill administrative duties, invoicing, communications, and report writing. Finally, she will visit public

health worksites to conduct nutrition counselling and assessment for individuals who are having babies.

The benefit of contract work is a flexible day and the ability to make time for family life. However, it requires discipline in earning, saving and spending money. Self-employment can often be difficult to find the appropriate work-life balance, especially when raising children. Though the general public may assume that Caroline's household would be perfectly healthy, she believes in a balance for her children and exercises the 80/20 rule, meaning they follow healthy choices 80% of the time but occasionally indulge in sweets. Caroline makes sure to talk openly about health, longevity and physical activity.

Caroline believes her greatest asset is her ability to improve peoples' lives by planting a seed for health and wellness improvement. Information and communication may not necessarily be adopted in the present, but hearing back from individuals years later is very impactful. Additionally, the ability to dispel misinformation about nutrition is a great part of what she does. Tips received, whether from the internet or family members, may not always stem from fact. The sheer volume of information people are able to consume has been a shortcoming in last 10 years and Caroline is able to provide clarification between good advice and poor advice. Finally, simply the human interaction and the opportunity to work with people is very rewarding. This includes seeing people's lives transform, experiencing healthy babies being born and observing positive changes in behaviour.

As a registered dietician, there are many important skills and personality traits that promote success. Caroline believes you need to be patient, personable and have strong public presentation skills to be successful in this role. You also need to hone your counselling skills to build confidence and capacity in others. As the owner of her own private practice, she highlights the need for organization when balancing and recording duties. She also emphasizes the power of being a good communicator, whether it is in person, over email or the ever-evolving social media platforms. Finally, it is important to understand your limits. As a dietician, she is not an expert in every and all fields. If she believes something is beyond her competency level, she will not hesitate to consider a patient referral.

To students considering this line of work, Caroline recommends visiting the Dietitians of Canada website. This resource provides short segments on different areas to work in, interviews with professionals, and much more! She also suggests investigating the College of Dietitians of Ontario website where you will find what exactly you need to do to fulfill this career path.

Caroline's final advice to students to increase their chances of success is to practice life-long learning, be patient with yourself and others, take interest in developing good rapport, and develop strong communication. "If life takes you down a different path, that is okay. You will always have your education. You will always have your experiences. No one will take those away from you. Those are things you can bring into any opportunity."