



## Fitness to Practice Guidelines

### Authority

*Health Professions Act*, sections 20, 32.2, 32.3 and 33; CDBC Bylaws, sections 60, 61, 69, 76(2).

### Introduction

Fitness to practice refers to a measure of health and wellness as it relates to one's ability to work as a professional. To be fit to practice means that a registrant is physically and mentally well enough to provide safe, competent, and ethical client care.

For dietetic practice, fitness to practice includes having the consistent ability to:

- meet the physical demands required in the practice setting (e.g., ergonomic considerations),
- think critically,
- exercise appropriate judgment and decision-making,
- sustain concentration and focus while practicing dietetics,
- communicate effectively, and
- perform skills appropriate to the practice setting (e.g., fine motor skills, perform calculations).

Dietitians may not be fit to practice if their capacity to perform these functions is impaired. However, CDBC recognizes that each circumstance is different. When a registrant self-discloses a potential fitness issue, the first line of approach is for CDBC to work with the registrant to review any risk to the public, and to identify appropriate accommodations and options. CDBC's approach is to be proactive in addressing risks to the public while also being supportive of the registrant. All disclosures are confidential to the limits established in section 20 and Part 3 of the *Health Professions Act*.

CDBC understands that there may be times when dietitians are unable to recognize that they are not fit to practice because of the effects of physical or mental health conditions or substance use disorders. If there is a concern that a dietitian has a condition that is likely to impair fitness to practice, this should be reported to CDBC so that appropriate steps can be taken to assess the situation and then work with the registrant. For more information, please see our [Duty to Report Q&A](#).

If there is a concern that another regulated health professional might constitute a danger to the public, there is a mandatory duty for registrants to report this risk to the applicable regulatory college under section 32.2 of the *Health Professions Act*. Members of the public are also encouraged to report any fitness to practice concerns to the appropriate College.

Examples of conditions that may impair a dietitian's ability to provide care in a safe and competent manner are listed below. Having one of these conditions does not necessarily mean

that a dietitian will be considered unfit to practice. The assessment must be based on such factors as the interplay between the actual condition, the type of work that the dietitian is engaged in, the work environment, and any duty to accommodate the limitations arising from the condition. Conditions may include, but are not limited to:

- physical injuries (e.g., broken or injured limbs, arm/wrist/finger, repetitive strain injury, recovery from planned or unplanned surgery)
- physical acute and/or chronic medical conditions (e.g., stroke, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, arthritis, cancer)
- physical disabilities (e.g., vision or hearing impairment, mobility impairment)
- mental illnesses (e.g., depression, schizophrenia, dementia)
- substance use disorders (e.g., alcohol, prescription drugs)
- effects from medication regimes (e.g., impairment from prescribed narcotic use for pain control).

#### *Returning to Practice:*

If a registrant is unsure if they are fit to practice, the registrant should contact CDBC before returning to work. In some circumstances, it may be necessary to provide medical clearance that the registrant is fit to return to practice. However, CDBC will work with the registrant to ensure that the transition back to practice takes place as quickly and as safely as possible.

## **Guidelines**

- 1. Like all health professionals, dietitians have a responsibility to:**
  - maintain their health and wellness in order to practice the profession safely, competently, and ethically;
  - seek appropriate medical help and/or make adjustments to their practice if health difficulties are affecting their ability to perform their professional services;
  - refrain from practice if a condition is impairing their ability to practice in a safe and competent manner; and
  - advise the College if they are experiencing fitness to practice issues which are impairing their ability to practice safely and competently.
- 2. Dietitians can regularly assess their own health in the context of professional responsibilities by asking the following:**
  - Am I acting in the best interest of my clients?
  - Am I able to meet the physical and emotional demands of my job?
  - Am I able to make appropriate judgements and communicate them effectively?
  - Am I able to perform my professional duties safely and accurately?
  - Am I able to meet all of CDBC's Standards of Practice requirements?
- 3. Dietitians can regularly assess themselves for signs of chronic stress by asking themselves if they are experiencing the following and if this is interfering significantly with their job functioning and/or personal life:**
  - Am I wanting to be left alone/not bothered by anyone at work?

- Am I avoiding co-workers and/or avoiding talking with clients and families?
- Am I focussing my attention on paper-work and other non-client centred tasks?
- Do I constantly feel critical of my co-workers?
- Do I feel that work is meaningless and/or feel like I am just going through the motions or putting in time?
- Am I feeling negative about everything at work and/or the profession itself?
- Am I frequently calling in sick?
- Am I procrastinating or forgetful?
- Am I unable to concentrate or solve problems?
- Have I been making mistakes or omissions, or having accidents on the job?
- Am I working below my potential?
- Do I feel like I have nothing to offer and/or am I questioning my own competence as a professional?

If you reflect on the list above and believe you may be experiencing stress, don't be alarmed and, above all, don't be too critical of yourself. Remember, to become burned out or be chronically experiencing stress, you had to have been a caring and compassionate health professional at one time.

Dietetics can be a stressful profession. Caring for clients — individuals, families, groups, populations, or entire communities — with multiple, complex, and distressing conditions can be overwhelming for even the most experienced professional. Add to this the uncertainty of health care changes and fewer resources, the challenges of providing care can sometimes seem unreasonable and even unmanageable.

#### **4. Dietitians can take action to maintain or improve their health and wellness.**

Some examples include:

- *Physical health*
  - Eating a balanced diet
  - Staying hydrated
  - Getting adequate exercise and rest
  - Committing to a healthy work-life balance
- *Mental/psychological health*
  - Pursuing wellness through mindfulness and relaxation techniques
  - Taking resilience training
  - Getting therapy or counselling
  - Keeping a journal
  - Taking time to clarify your values, beliefs, and goals.
  - Reading material that is unrelated to work
- *Emotional health*
  - Being aware of your strengths and acknowledging them regularly
  - Protecting and maintaining cultural and recreational interests outside of dietetics
  - Protecting personal time and relationships with family and friends

- Identifying comforting activities, objects, people, relationships, places, and actively seeking them out.
- *Spiritual health*
  - Engaging in self-reflection
  - Spending time in nature
  - Finding a spiritual connection or community that is meaningful for you

*Portions of this Guideline have been developed by adapting content from other Canadian health regulators and associations. CDBC gratefully acknowledges the related guidelines published by the BC College of Oral Health.*

## **References**

1. British Columbia College of Oral Health Professionals. Interpretation Guidelines: Fitness to Practice. [02.02.022-IG-Fitness-to-Practice.pdf \(oralhealthbc.ca\)](https://www.oralhealthbc.ca/02.02.022-IG-Fitness-to-Practice.pdf); accessed Dec 14 2023.
2. College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia (now BC College of Nurses and Midwives). Practice Support – Fitness to Practice (archived). [https://www.uvic.ca/hsd/nursing/assets/docs/undergraduate/transfer/current/crnbc\\_fitness.pdf](https://www.uvic.ca/hsd/nursing/assets/docs/undergraduate/transfer/current/crnbc_fitness.pdf); accessed Dec 14 2023.
3. Canadian Medical Association. Physician Wellness Hub: Self-care. <https://www.cma.ca/physician-wellness-hub/topics/self-care>; accessed Dec 14 2023.
4. College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Manitoba. Practice Direction: Fitness to Practice. <https://www.clpnm.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/PD-Fitness-to-Practice.pdf>; access Dec 14 2023.