

**Ask the Expert**  
*Arizona Republic*

**Q: “Low-fat,” “sugar-free” and “low-carb” are words that I see constantly on boxes of crackers, cereal and cookies. How can I be sure that I am eating smart and providing healthy meals for me and my family?**

**A:** There are so many products designed to appeal to consumers who are looking to eat a few less calories so they can feel good about what they are putting in their bodies. There are many nutrition messages as well about how to achieve optimal health. A registered dietitian is considered the ‘nutrition expert’ and can help answer your questions. In an effort to educate Americans about accurate and important nutrition information, the American Dietetic Association (ADA) has designated March as “National Nutrition Month” and March 10 as “National Registered Dietitians Day”. During this month, the ADA is encouraging people to find out who is their local registered dietitian.

Registered dietitians are also, promoting the importance of “nutrition check-ups” this year. In addition to going to your primary care provider each year for a check-up, dietitians help with treating health conditions like obesity, diabetes, and kidney disease, as well as help *prevent* potential health problems. Simple nutrition changes can make a significant difference in the quality of you and your family’s health.

During an annual nutrition check-up, a registered dietitian will discuss your nutrition routine and evaluate the quality and quantity of your choices. This annual check-up is a great time to be sure your menu is best for your individualized needs whether you have health conditions or just want to decrease your risk for developing medical conditions later in life.

Many health insurance plans cover visits with registered dietitians. Insurance typically only covers visits with registered dietitians, over those who call themselves “nutritionist”, because they have both the education and experience to provide care based on scientific evidence. You may want to call your health insurance company to determine whether or not this would be a covered benefit.



Catholic Healthcare West



*Nora Shank is a registered dietitian with Chandler Regional and Mercy Gilbert Medical Centers, and the media representative of the Arizona Dietetic Association in central Phoenix. For more information about the services available, please call our Community Nutrition Helpline at 480.728.5629 or to make an appointment, please call 480.728.3900, option 4. To find a registered dietitian in our area, you can also visit the American Dietetic Association's website [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org).*