



TOP 100 SKILLS IN PUBLIC HEALTH

and

NUTRITION MANAGEMENT

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Top 100 Skills in Public Health and Nutrition Management

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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INTRODUCTION

Top 100 Skills in Public Health and Nutrition Management is designed to guide action-oriented skill development for students as well as for practitioners looking to expand their skill base in public health, community nutrition, and nutrition management. This workbook-style guide is written in a user-friendly format with interactive content that encourages self-reflection and offers an opportunity for the reader to practice applying new skills.

A skill set is a category of abilities needed to perform a job or task. While an ability is the capacity to engage in a task, a skill is the ability obtained from knowledge to do something well, which can be acquired through training, practice, or experience. Both ability and knowledge are required to become proficient in a skill. Knowing what skills are needed for various career paths can help to shape training, education, and job opportunities.

Skills are often categorized as either hard skills or soft skills. Both are essential components of a well-rounded skill set, but they differ in nature and application:

- **Hard skills** are generally quantifiable and technical, learned through education or training, and include skills such as data analysis, program development, and foreign language skills. Job-specific skill sets are typically hard skills necessary for a specific career; for example, registered dietitian nutritionists in clinical settings must demonstrate skills around nutrition assessment, medical nutrition therapy, and nutrition counseling.
- **Soft skills** are interpersonal or behavioral and relate to how workers interact with others and navigate social situations. These skills are often inherent or developed and honed over time through practice, observation, and self-awareness. Examples include communication skills, teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, and conflict resolution. Soft skills are generally considered transferable across various career paths. For example, many soft skills can apply to different areas of dietetics practice because they require interaction with various audiences, such as patients, clients, general public, other health care professionals, media, businesses, home health agencies, politicians, coaches and trainers, the food industry, health insurance companies, organizations, and more.

The 100 skills covered in this guide are divided into 5 sections that broadly cover areas of emphasis applying to dietetics practice in public health, community nutrition, and nutrition management. Each skill is covered in a similar format.



SKILL OVERVIEW

This section includes a **Definition** of the skill, its **Application** to dietetics practice, and an **Introduction** that provides additional knowledge needed to understand and practice the skill.



STEPS FOR APPLICATION

This section breaks down the skill into actionable steps that the reader can follow and apply in their education, practice, or specific situation. A concept map is included that provides an example of how to organize thoughts and actions around a specific skill.



CASE STUDY

A case study is provided as an example that demonstrates the skill. Some case studies follow the suggested steps and others are presented in a problem and solution format.



YOUR ACTION PLAN

This section offers the user an opportunity to write down a scenario where the skill can be practiced by following the suggested steps and then completing a self-assessment that includes criteria and a rubric for evaluating mastery.



ENHANCE YOUR SKILLS

This section includes some follow-up activities and ideas for researching or brainstorming to further develop and practice the skill.

For students and educators, the skills covered in this guide align with various competencies identified by ACEND (Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics) that focus on preparation and evaluation for minimum competence upon completion of a dietetics education program and during early years of practice.

For practitioners, the skills covered in this guide are components of many of the Essential Practice Competencies for CDR (the Commission on Dietetics Registration) credentialed nutrition and dietetics practitioners (the registered dietitian [RDN] and the nutrition and dietetic technician, registered [NDTR]), including both core and select functional competencies and their corresponding performance indicators. The core essential practice competencies describe the knowledge, skills, judgment, and attitudes that apply to all credentialed practitioners regardless of role, area of practice, or setting. The functional essential practice competencies describe the role-specific knowledge, skills, judgment, and attitudes needed for a particular practice focus.

For public health professionals and students, the Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals are a consensus set of knowledge and skills for the broad practice of public health. These are also defined by the 10 Essential Public Health Services and reflect foundational knowledge and skills for engaging in public health practice, education, and research.



SKILLS ASSESSMENT AND RESOURCES

Career One Stop www.careeronestop.org/ExploreCareers/Assessments/skills.aspx

Department of Labor, Soft Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success

www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/softskills.pdf

Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator www.mbtionline.com

Sixteen Personalities Test www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test

The MAPP Career Assessment www.assessment.com

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COMMUNICATION

Communication—the human connection—is the key to personal and career success.

PAUL MEYER



SKILL OVERVIEW

Definition: *Communication*, whether written or spoken, involves the use of words to impart or exchange news, information, thoughts, and opinions. From the intent of the sender through creation of the message to the receiver who decodes and interprets the message, oral communication has the potential to clarify or confuse an issue. Language is the vehicle.

Application: Public health providers and managers need to communicate with many clients, colleagues, decision-makers, community groups, funders, and administrators. Clear and effective messages are important elements of accomplishing work goals and objectives. A large component of public health or management is communicating the value of what you're doing. For clients/patients, effective communication is important for safety, efficient use of time, and self-management. Additionally, other skills enhancements may improve oral communications. For example, learning about assertiveness, negotiation skills, cultural competency, and conflict resolution can help.

Introduction: Effective communication, whether formal or informal, facilitates positive outcomes in group or individual sessions with clients, colleagues, administrators, and population groups. Furthermore, proactive communication can establish and improve relationships. To be an effective communicator, you must pay attention to *how* you are delivering the message as well as *what* you are saying. Not every person will understand the message right away, but it is the effective communicator's job to ask questions to clarify issues as needed.

Poorly communicated messages can disrupt or destroy relationships with clients, colleagues, or administrators. That is why a two-way conversation should occur whenever possible. When that conversation starts, remember that active listening is as important as sharing the message.



STEPS FOR APPLYING THE SKILL

Step 1: Select a communication issue to be resolved in your organization.

- Determine an issue: Has a staff member been communicating inappropriately to clients or colleagues? Is a coworker continually training new hires in a confusing manner?
- Establish a vision of how you would like the communication plan to benefit your group.

Step 2: Gather ideas and knowledge.

- Determine the message you want to share.
- Determine your audience. Do they have cultural or language differences from you? If so, how do you plan to alleviate confusion?

Step 3: Identify the focus area.

- Think about where communication may be breaking down. Consider whether you are clear in your message and how others react to your message. This helps determine your focus area.
- The focus area may include problems, obstacles, or challenges.

Step 4: Generate possible solutions and choose the best one to implement.

- Create a list of solutions.
- Draw a *concept map* to organize your thoughts, similar to the one on the next page.
- Choose the best solution.

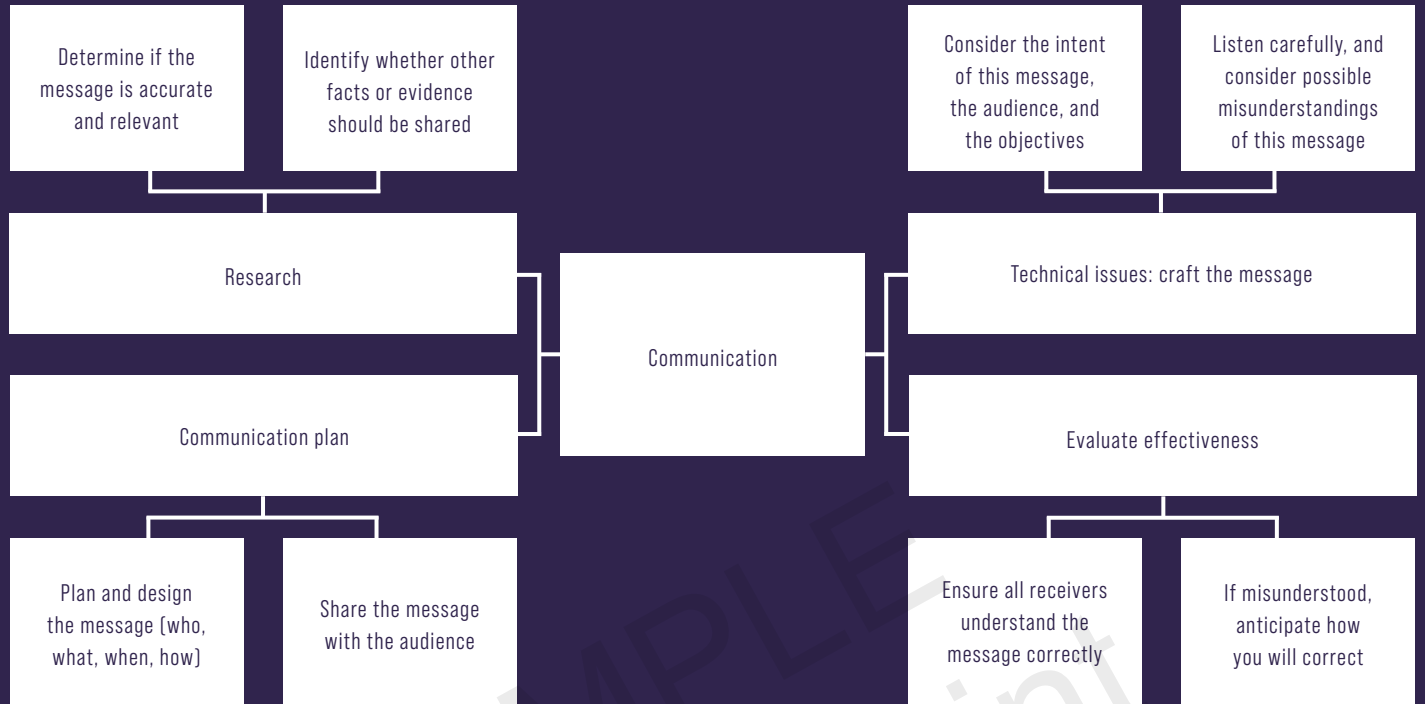
Step 5: Create and implement a communication plan.

- Practice reciting the words or message in advance. If the plan is complicated, perhaps try it out on a friend or family member to see how it is received.
- Include the rationale for sharing this message.
- Resolve any cultural or language concerns before the message is sent.

Step 6: Evaluate the impact of the communication plan.

- Evaluate the recipients' body language, words, and response to the message.
- If the message is not understood, use corrective actions or words to resolve any concerns.
- Obtain feedback from stakeholders (staff, clients, management).
- Adjust the plan as needed to accommodate feedback.

CONCEPT MAP: COMMUNICATION



CASE STUDY

Ivan, a nutrition faculty member for over 20 years, is well respected in his field, and speaks at national and international meetings several times a year. Lately, he has been short-tempered with more than one student in his classes and several students have complained that the environment is not conducive to learning. His department chair, Meena, has been advised of this behavior and she is quite surprised by it. Meena must bring Ivan into her office to find out the reasons why Ivan's behavior has changed.

Identify the focus area. Ivan's behavior in his classes is interfering with his students' ability to learn and is resulting in negative feedback.

Generate possible solutions and choose the best one to implement. Meena and Ivan must have a discussion. Perhaps Ivan has some personal or health issues that have caused him to be distracted and impatient. Once he understands how his behavior is affecting students in his classes, he should acknowledge this with his students. It is important to follow the organization's corrective action policy, as it may be applicable in this case. In addition, the manager should discuss any employee assistance programs (EAP) that may be available for Ivan to use.

Create and implement a change management plan. The meeting should take place soon after Meena learns of the change in Ivan's behavior. If he needs to take some time off for personal or health reasons, he should indicate this during the meeting. Meena will document about the meeting in his employee file and will follow up with Ivan or his students to ensure that he has corrected his behavior.



YOUR ACTION PLAN

Now develop your own plan to manage a communication issue within your organization.

Step 1: Select a communication issue to be resolved in your organization.

Step 2: Gather ideas and knowledge.

Step 3: Identify a focus area.

Step 4: Generate possible solutions and choose the best one to implement.

Step 5: Create and implement a communication plan.

Step 6: Evaluate the impact of the communication plan.

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Use the following self-assessment rubric to evaluate Your Action Plan. Give yourself 10 points for answering Yes, 5 points for Partially, and 0 points for No.

SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	SCORING Yes = 10 points Partially = 5 points No = 0 points
1. Did you establish a vision for how this communication plan will resolve an issue to benefit your organization?	
2. Did you use a variety of means to gather knowledge and ideas?	
3. Were you able to identify the major problem areas?	
4. Did you think through the possible solutions, choose the best one, and plan for sufficient resources?	
5. Did you craft a well-planned message and practice communicating it?	
6. Did you include obtaining feedback from stakeholders and adjusting the message as needed?	
TOTAL Novice: 0–15 points Competent: 16–30 points Experienced: 31–45 points Expert: 46–60 points	



ENHANCE YOUR SKILLS

Practice this skill with some of the following exercises:

- Read seminal literature on effective communication, such as Barb Mayfield’s *Communicating Nutrition: The Authoritative Guide* or Julie Grim and Susan Renee Roberts’ *Effective Leadership & Management in Nutrition & Dietetics*.
- Discuss how attitudes, beliefs, cultural differences, and knowledge affect the outcome of communications.
- Describe how effective communication can lead to goal achievement.
- Research different communication styles, such as direct versus indirect and high-context versus low-context.
- Research the importance of nonverbal communication (body language, posture, head nods, eye contact, hand gestures).
- Create a concept map for Ivan’s Case Study or for Your Action Plan.
- Brainstorm other ideas that Ivan could have used to manage his communication more effectively.



LIFESTYLE INTERVENTION

If we could give every individual the right amount of nourishment and exercise, not too little and not too much, we would have found the safest way to health.

HIPPOCRATES



SKILL OVERVIEW

Definition: *Lifestyle interventions* involve the act of altering one's habits, attitudes, tastes, or standards to achieve a better sense of self and overall well-being. Most interventions involve coaching, recommending, and some form of follow-up.

Application: It has become an integral part of dietetic and nutrition practice to educate clients or patients on lifestyle interventions pertaining to diet and physical activity. With the increasing occurrence of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancers, clinicians must be equipped with the knowledge about lifestyle alterations to manage these chronic conditions. Most importantly, they must know how to relay this knowledge to the public through education and counseling.

Introduction: Studies demonstrate that lifestyle interventions are vital to making long-term changes in food behaviors and dietary habits. The advantages to lifestyle change are long-lasting when adopted into one's activities of daily living. Nutrition providers need to acquire effective lifestyle modification skills to work with the public. Clients will need new skills, not just education. Active problem-solving skills and self-discovery are important elements of lifestyle modification. When working with clients, help them set individualized SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound).

Chronic diseases can often be managed with lifestyle alterations. For example, studies show numerous benefits of weight loss, including improvements in glycemic control, risk factors for cardiovascular disease, quality of life, and other obesity-related coexisting illnesses. Enhancing physical activity may reduce some of the pain and stiffness of arthritis. Adding spices and herbs while cooking can improve the anti-inflammatory effects of diet. When providing lifestyle changes, it is important that practitioners seek and apply evidence-based or evidence-informed interventions.



STEPS FOR APPLYING THE SKILL

Step 1: Select a chronic disease or condition for which you will offer lifestyle interventions.

- Choose a topic that is relevant for your client(s).

Step 2: Gather ideas and knowledge.

- Review current research/literature about the disease.
- Incorporate at least three peer-reviewed sources on lifestyle interventions.
- Research any diets suggested to manage this disease.
- Find easy-to-follow tips for making changes in daily routines.
- Look for additional tips to offer as time progresses.

Step 3: Discuss less desirable lifestyle choices that impact the progression of the disease or condition.

- Provide evidence-based research to support the facts.

Step 4: Suggest several interventions; identify ways to present these to an individual or group of clients.

- Identify or acquire sufficient resources for implementing the interventions.

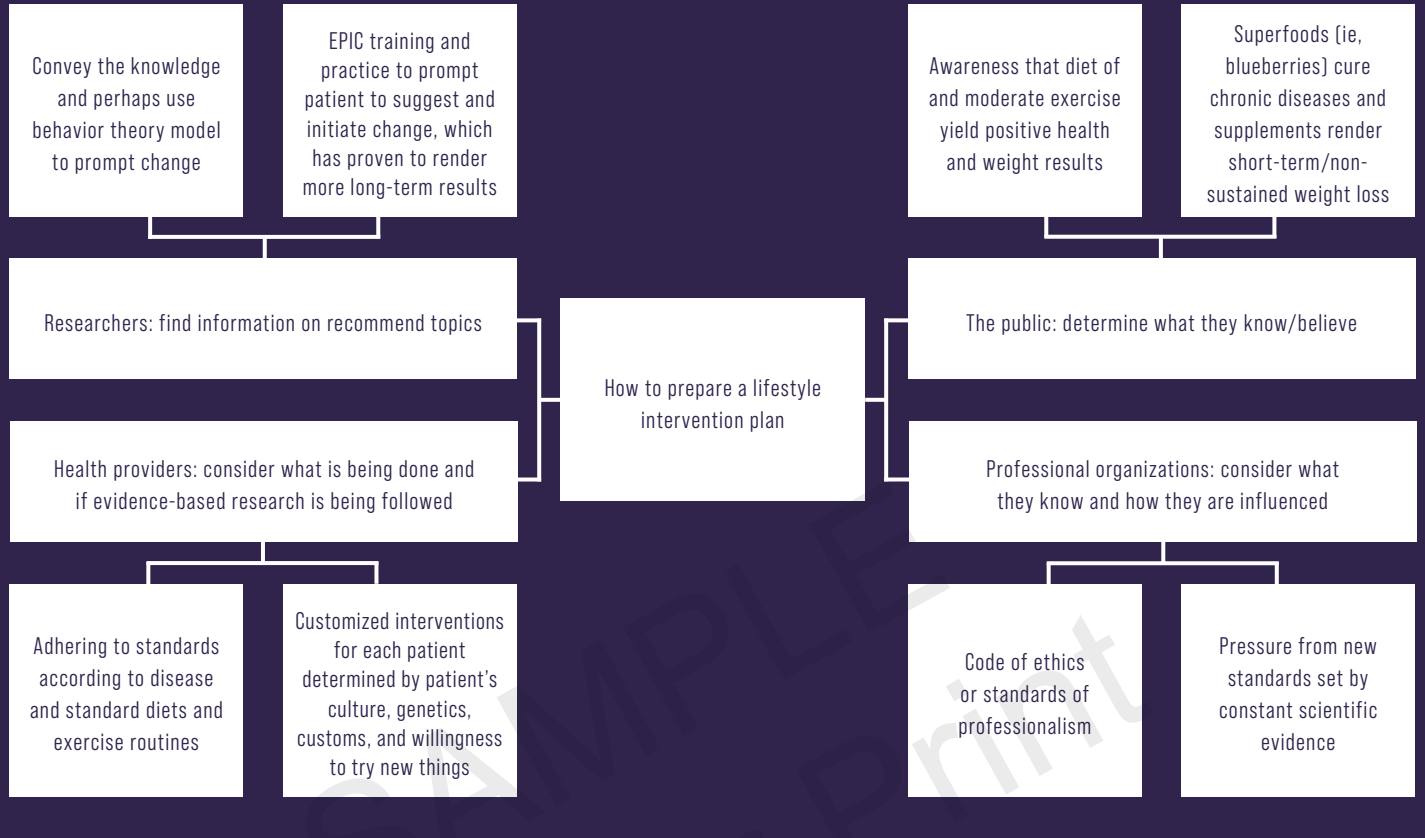
Step 5: Detail the behavior model or methods to use for these lifestyle interventions.

- Include aesthetically pleasing techniques of persuasion (visual, auditory, demonstration).
- Share modification techniques in small, manageable tips.
- Create a *concept map* to organize your thoughts (see the example on the next page).

Step 6: (If possible) Practice this plan by meeting with an actual patient or group.

- Evaluate the techniques over time for their effectiveness.
- Note ineffective techniques and discontinue use.

CONCEPT MAP: LIFESTYLE INTERVENTION



CASE STUDY

Louisa is leaving the long-term care environment and will be working at a kidney dialysis center. The facility gets an average of two new admissions a month; most are new to dialysis. Louisa is familiar with the diet for chronic kidney disease but is searching for effective ways to counsel the patients receiving dialysis on lifestyle changes they must make to optimize their treatment. She also wants them to stay well, ensuring their optimal well-being.

This month's new patients are both men and report not grocery shopping or cooking for themselves; their wives complete these tasks for them. Louisa struggles to touch base with the wives concerning the kidney diet outside of their working hours. Once Louisa connects with the wives, she finds they are not receptive to the lifestyle changes needed for their husbands. The wives are slightly offended; one stated, "She's trying to tell me what to buy and how to cook for my family!"

Gather ideas and knowledge. The diet for chronic kidney disease includes many adjustments that must be made, including to nutrient intake (eg, potassium, sodium, and phosphorus), adherence to the use of phosphorus binders, and possibly fluid restriction. The dietary prescription often changes depending on the results of laboratory tests and physician visits.

Case study continued on next page

Identify a focus area. The wives are not receptive and are initially unwilling to be taught the kidney diet in order to shop and cook differently for their husbands.

Generate possible solutions and choose the best one to implement. Since the patients are seen at the dialysis unit during the evening hours, invite all of their spouses to an evening reception. Plan a program where basic instructions about the diet can be shared by peers. The “what” can come from the instructor, and the “how” from the peer support group. Making the changes seem reasonable is a good start. Later, continue to offer one-to-one counseling for each wife individually.

Create and implement a plan. Conduct a question-and-answer session at the beginning of the event to encourage patients and their families to inquire about the different nutrients, foods, and guidelines of the kidney diet. Coach peers to share what they have learned on managing the diet at home.

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YOUR ACTION PLAN

Now develop your own plan to manage lifestyle intervention

Step 1: Select a chronic disease or condition for which you will offer lifestyle interventions.

Step 2: Gather ideas and knowledge.

Step 3: Discuss less desirable lifestyle choices that impact the progression of the disease or condition.

Step 4: Suggest several interventions; identify ways to present these to an individual or group of clients.

Step 5: Detail the behavior model or methods to use for these lifestyle interventions.

Step 6: (If possible) Practice this plan by meeting with an actual patient or group.

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Use the following self-assessment rubric to evaluate Your Action Plan. Give yourself 10 points for answering Yes, 5 points for Partially, and 0 points for No.

SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS	SCORING Yes = 10 points Partially = 5 points No = 0 points
1. Did you choose a topic that is relevant for your client(s)?	
2. Did you find at least three peer-reviewed sources in your research?	
3. Did you identify the less desirable lifestyle choices that impact the progression of the disease or condition?	
4. Did you come up with several interventions and identify ways to present them?	
5. Did you detail the behavior model or methods to use for the lifestyle intervention?	
6. Did you evaluate the techniques and adjust the plan as needed?	
TOTAL Novice: 0–15 points Competent: 16–30 points Experienced: 31–45 points Expert: 46–60 points	



ENHANCE YOUR SKILLS

Practice this skill with some of the following exercises:

- Recall and teach the different dietary modifications for various chronic diseases.
- Discuss general healthy lifestyle choices and techniques, such as smoking cessation.
- Consider how you can use social media to follow and to keep patients engaged with their progress and lifestyle changes.
- Create an infographic with lifestyle modification tips for addressing a health concern.
- Create a concept map for Louisa’s Case Study.
- Brainstorm other ideas that Louisa could have used to manage the lifestyle intervention.