

Frequently Asked Questions – Can dietitians recommend specific brands?

Dietitians in all practice areas encounter opportunities to refer to specific products and therefore can influence their clients' purchasing decisions. Dietitians are accountable to always conduct themselves ethically and competently with the first obligation focused on the wellbeing of their client. It is recommended Dietitians focus on teaching clients on nutrition education and label reading rather than recommending specific brands. The focus of the Dietitian is to promote food literacy and the ability of clients to select the best option for their health status, preference, ethnicity, finances, resources, and diet requirements. Use of non-brand or generic food ideas are best to recommend and discuss. If specific brand names are discussed as examples, they must include a disclaimer outlining options for using alternative products, indicate the Dietitian is not endorsing one product over another, and be supported by evidence-based research. Dietitians must not recommend, sell or endorse products or product lines that are unnecessary or where the product's efficacy or safety is not supported by quality evidence-based research. Transparency is of utmost importance to maintaining both public trust and the integrity of the profession. It is the dietitian's responsibility to disclose any perceived or actual conflict of interest at the first possible opportunity. Dietitians are expected to disclose to a client when a product is being sold for a profit, the client should be given options and reassured that service will not be compromised if the product is not purchased. If a dietitian remains uncertain about recommending a product they can reach out to the Registrar or Deputy Registrar with further questions.

To answer this question in further detail we turn to the College of Dietitians of Prince Edward Island (CDPEI) Code of Ethics and the Standards of Practice. *Please note specific sections have been pulled for this FAQ, please review documents in full to confirm you are practicing within regulations and scope.*

CDPEI Code of Ethics

Section 3.10 Products and Services

(1) The dietitian does not recommend, promote, advertise, distribute, endorse or sell products or services in the provision of professional services where the efficacy or safety of products or services:

- a) is not supported by evidence-based research;
- b) has not been tested or verified by credible sources.



(2) The dietitian does not recommend, promote, advertise, distribute, endorse or sell products or services in which the dietitian, or individuals connected to the dietitian, have a financial or other interest unless the dietitian at the same time:

- a) fully discloses the financial or other interest;
- b) informs the client they have the option of using alternative products or services;
- c) assures the client that choosing alternative products or services will not affect the quality of professional services provided by the dietitian.

(3) The dietitian does not use professional titles and initials or make any reference to being a member of the dietetic profession or the College, or having dietetic education and training with respect to any products or services that do not relate to the provision of dietetic professional services.

3.8 Conflict of Interest

(1) The dietitian avoids real or perceived conflict of interest in which their professional integrity, professional independence or the provision of professional services could be influenced or compromised

(2) When the dietitian identifies a conflict of interest the dietitian must resolve the conflict by fully acknowledging the conflict, ensuring that it is understood and accepted by all parties or discontinue professional services.

3.7 Advertising / Promotion and Endorsements

(1) The dietitian does not engage in any form of advertising/promotion or endorsement of products and services that:

- a) takes advantage of or exploits vulnerable individuals;
- b) makes statements or claims that are false, misleading, inaccurate or unverifiable;
- c) creates an unjustified expectation about the results that can be achieved;
- d) compares the quality of services or fees to those of another individual.

(2) The dietitian does not allow their name or professional titles and initials to be used in connection with any product or service that:

- a) provides an endorsement that has not been given;
- b) has not been evaluated by the dietitian;
- c) misrepresents the product or service;



- d) misrepresents the association of the dietitian with the product or service;
- e) affects the credibility of the dietitian or the profession.

(3) The dietitian must keep a copy of any advertising/promotion or endorsement for a period of one year following the date in which it last appears. The dietitian must provide a copy to the College on request.

CDPEI Standards of Practice

Standard 1. Advertising

Registered Dietitians provide information about professional services and/or products that is accurate and complies with applicable legislative and regulatory requirements.

Indicators

To demonstrate this standard, Registered Dietitians will:

- a) Ensure that advertising is an honest and fair representation of professional services and/or products offered.
- b) Adhere to the CDPEI Code of Ethics and refrain from using advertising that directly or indirectly:
 - i. creates unjustified expectations about the results;
 - ii. compares the ability, quality, and/or cost of professional services with that of other Registered Dietitians;
 - iii. takes advantage either physically, emotionally or financially of clients; and
 - iv. endorses, promotes or recommends use of a product/brand used/sold as a component of professional services, unless supported by evidence and in accordance with CDPEI practice directives.
- c) Avoid using client testimonials to endorse professional services and/or products. Practice Outcome Clients can expect Registered Dietitians to advertise professional services and/or products in an accurate and ethical manner.

Practice Outcome: Clients can expect Registered Dietitians to advertise professional services and/or products in an accurate and ethical manner.

Standard 8. Conflict of Interest

Registered Dietitians will avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest in which professional integrity, independence, or the provision of professional services could be

compromised. Conflicts of interest which cannot be avoided must be disclosed and managed.

Indicators

To demonstrate this standard, Registered Dietitians will:

- a) Recognize any situations in which a conflict of interest could have an impact on their professional judgment.
- b) Avoid any conflict of interest in which professional services could be compromised.
- c) Disclose, manage, and/or discontinue professional services when a conflict of interest cannot be avoided.
- d) Document any conflict of interest, the efforts to manage it, and the outcome(s).
- e) Provide options for the provision of services and/or products when a conflict of interest exists.
- f) Refrain from accepting personal incentives (e.g., gifts, donations, funding, recruitment/referral fees) from service and/or product sponsors (excluding nominal gifts).
- g) Refrain from offering incentives that place personal gain above professional responsibilities.

Practice Outcome: Clients can expect Registered Dietitians to provide safe, competent, ethical professional services that are in the client's best interests and to disclose and manage any conflicts of interest.

Definitions:

"Products" means any products, items, or materials a dietitian provides in the context of their professional practice. May include food products, supplements, books, information, materials, or handouts.

"Dietitian" means a member registered in the register of dietitians according to the Dietitian Regulations.

"Client" means an individual, family, substitute decision-maker, group, agency, government, employer, employee, business, organization or community who is the direct or indirect recipient(s) of the dietitian's expertise

Recommended Reading and References:

NSCDN [Position Statement on the Sale, Endorsement and Recommendations of Products](#)

[CDPEI Code of Ethics](#)

[CDPEI Standards of Practice](#)

[CDPEI Practice Directives: Social Media](#)

[CDO: Promoting Brand Name Products](#)