



## Walking an Aisle in Their Shoes

By Barbara Ruhs



# Healthy Competition

Supermarket dietitians offer many timely solutions and opportunities for today's progressive grocer.

**P**harmacists have traditionally been the most trusted health resource for supermarket customers. But as supermarkets catch on to the value of adding dietitians to their corporate and store teams, another trusted voice has emerged.

Dietitians bring extensive knowledge of food and nutrition to the table and, in many cases, other useful areas of expertise. Like most supermarket dietitians, before working for a retailer, I spent a good chunk of my nutrition career in many different areas, gaining knowledge of public health, research, disease prevention and sports nutrition. This

background and experience are important, as a supermarket dietitian requires a broad base of knowledge and skills to effectively bring value to the retailer and customers she serves.

A supermarket dietitian's primary goal is to be an advocate for customers' health. This is the key ingredient in a retailer's success in hiring a dietitian, and the most important ingredient in developing the customer's trust. Dietitians can work in many different capacities,

but primarily function as either a corporate or in-store dietitian. At the corporate level, dietitians can play a strategic role in aligning nutrition and health with existing marketing platforms, while in-store dietitians work locally to meet specific nutrition and health concerns.

Dietitians provide a competitive advantage to their retailers. Corporate dietitians may play an integral role in designing and implementing a comprehensive nutrition shelf-labeling program, while in-store dietitians can maximize the return on the investment by educating customers at point of purchase, and drive incremental sales volume with in-store events and educational programs.

Now more than ever, preventive health is at the forefront. Helping shoppers easily find better choices at affordable prices is essential. Although price is important, there are other strategies that can also inspire shoppers to buy more healthy prod-

ucts. Shelf-labeling programs, culinary demos, food sampling, and time-saving healthy-eating tools like menus and shopping lists can inspire larger basket size and cultivate loyalty among shoppers.

Among shelf-labeling programs, the American Heart Association's "Heart-Check" program garners consumer confidence and can impact sales. At Bashas', we have a customized program that calls out more than a dozen nutritional attributes. Shoppers find the colorful shelf tags easy to use and regularly ask for updated shopping lists to help guide shopping for disease prevention and management.

We've discovered that creating designated zones that call out, for example, heart-healthy or gluten-free products can significantly impact sales. Even simply highlighting healthy attributes can make a difference. Bashas' has more than two dozen signs for different produce items that highlight specific health and nutritional attributes. Another retailer has created "Dietitian's Picks" signs that change monthly, along with signage that educates customers on a different health theme every month.

Educating shoppers on preparing healthy foods is another powerful tool to build culinary confidence. For example, quinoa, a naturally gluten-free whole grain, may not sell until you help shoppers learn how to prepare it. Culinary demonstrations and food sampling, along with easy-to-prepare recipes, are more great ways to drive traffic and loyalty.

Pittsburgh-based Giant Eagle offers extensive dietitian-based culinary education, while Maine's Hannaford has several dietitians who offer in-store culinary demos and sampling. Others, including Hy-Vee, H-E-B and United Supermarkets, e-mail weekly menus that highlight sale items.

I've heard from friends and family that this simple one-stop-shop menu-planning tool is their go-to each week. It's a valuable timesaver, and savvy shoppers often find weekly ads and national coupon campaigns are in sync with retailer menus. **PG**

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