

# Future doctors need more nutrition education

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Medical students need more support to increase their nutrition knowledge and skills before they graduate a Griffith University study has found.

The five-year study published in the journal *BMJ Nutrition, Prevention and Health*, examined over 100 New Zealand [medical students](#)' self-reported nutrition knowledge at three time points during their medical training by asking them to complete the same survey at the end of year 2, year 4 and year 5 of their degree.

"While the students modestly increased their nutrition knowledge and [skills](#) between year 2 and year 4, the overall results were still very low," says lead author Associate Professor Lauren Ball from Menzies Health Institute Queensland.

"There was a clear desire for more nutrition education from all students. A key strategy to support [healthy eating](#) is to incorporate nutrition into healthcare service and doctors are expected to provide nutrition advice to patients to improve their diet when necessary. But to provide nutrition care, doctors require adequate nutrition knowledge, skills and attitudes to support the

integration of such care into routine practice with patients."

Associate Professor Ball said it was recognized that graduating medical students lack nutrition knowledge and skills to actively support dietary behavior change in patients.

"This is the first study to describe how medical students' self-perceived nutrition competence changes over time during medical training. These results show that further supporting medical students to increase their knowledge and skills in this area is essential. While the study was conducted in New Zealand, Australian students face the same challenges as their counterparts across the ditch because medical programs are accredited by the same body, with identical mandatory components. Given the recognized link between nutrition and health, one approach to consider is making [nutrition education](#) compulsory for [medical training](#)."

**More information:** Jennifer Crowley et al. How does self-perceived nutrition competence change over time during medical training? A prospective longitudinal observational study of New Zealand medical students, *BMJ Nutrition, Prevention & Health* (2020). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjnph-2020-000080](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjnph-2020-000080)

Provided by Griffith University

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