

# Professional Liability Risks for Dietitians and Nutritionists

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Warhol spoke about 15 minutes of fame as something that everyone desires – however, medical malpractice lawsuits are an unpleasant way to gain that level of attention. It's been 25 years since dietitians could claim that no dietitian had ever been successfully sued for malpractice – and in that quarter of a century, the risks have only increased.

Since only 3% of all medical malpractice claims go to trial, it's important to pay attention to your overall malpractice threat level. The cash drain of settling lawsuits is a constant risk that can be somewhat prevented as long as the risks of practicing as a dietitian are properly managed.

## **High risk areas of Dietetics:**

Long term care settings such as prisons and nursing homes have a greater risk due to the likelihood of mortality for the patient, and the potential for mistreatment from other levels of the organization – if the environment is poor or the patient's other care providers are not performing to the patients needs or with your recommendations, you could wind up getting the blame as the RD.

Unintended weight loss – in these situations, it's important to record how many times the plan of care was evaluated, how much the family and doctor was involved, and what kind of a defensive plan was taken in response to the patient's condition

Tube feeding – if a family wishes not to engage in tube feeding when the patient is in need of it, it's important to record how serious the issue is, explain to the family that the patient could die, and make record of every interaction on the subject. Also, having the physician document the poor prognosis, and the resident's decline, will keep the communication flowing and protect you from malpractice threats.

Need for liquid food and soft diets – often times families and patients will refuse this treatment, but unfortunately, according to [Today's Dietitian](#), these waivers are not working in court.

Always remember to document these situations heavily, and with the help of the physician. Make sure that these communication is flowing and paperwork is securely maintained.

While you may be covered by your employer's insurance, it's important to get the attention that will prevent your career from suffering. If you have your own insurance, you're guaranteed professional legal coverage, and your chances of escaping the situation without damage to your record are much improved. Visit [cphins.com](http://cphins.com) for a free quote on your [Nutritionist's professional liability policy](#) today.