**Nutritional Analysis Software**

**Why do I need this software?**

The majority of freelance dietitians find that a software programme containing a nutritional database is an invaluable resource for their business. These programmes may be used to calculate nutrient intake for:

- An individual patient
- Analyse a recipe
- Evaluate a menu
- Research purposes

A range of nutritional analysis programmes are available, most of which can be assessed for a free trial period via the company’s web site (see Appendix). Make use of this offer to evaluate a number of programmes.

This fact sheet is designed to highlight the points to consider when deciding which nutritional analysis programme will best meet your business needs.

**What Hardware Do I need?**

If the software program is for offline use, check initially that the programme can run on your PC or Apple Macintosh.

Internet access is pivotal for some online programmes or for future updates. Due to the size of updates (often greater than 1.0GB in size) it would be best to choose a broadband package that allows for unlimited data downloads.

**Licence agreement**

Each company will ask you to sign a licence agreement for use and this must be respected. Programmes sold to universities and hospitals are exempt from VAT on the understanding that they will only be used for teaching, clinical work or research.

Therefore it is fraudulent to ‘borrow’ such a programme for your own use for private work. If you also work for a hospital, purchase your own copy.
### Table 1. UK Nutritional Analysis Software List

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<tr>
<th>General Offline Programs</th>
<th>Online Programs</th>
<th>Dietary Analysis Services</th>
<th>School Catering Analysis</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dowleses Systems: MicroDiet</td>
<td><strong>Nutritics</strong> <a href="http://www.nutritics.com">www.nutritics.com</a></td>
<td><strong>Nutricalc</strong> <a href="http://www.nutricalc.co.uk/">http://www.nutricalc.co.uk/</a></td>
<td><strong>HPort Hport SE School Food Software</strong> <a href="http://www.hport.co.uk">http://www.hport.co.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nutrition Systems CompEat Pro</td>
<td>Nutrition Systems DietSure</td>
<td><strong>Catering for Schools</strong> <a href="http://www.catering4schools.com">www.catering4schools.com</a></td>
<td><strong>Nutmeg Nutrition Meal Planner</strong> <a href="http://www.nutmeg-uk.com">www.nutmeg-uk.com</a></td>
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<td>Tinuviel Software WISP</td>
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<td>Nutrition Systems DietSure4Schools <a href="http://www.dietsure.com/4schools/">http://www.dietsure.com/4schools/</a></td>
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<td>Pelican Buying Ltd. NutriPlanIT</td>
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<td>Robert Gordon University WinDiets</td>
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### What do you get for your money?

All nutritional analysis programmes include as standard the nutrient database McCance and Widdowson's *The Composition of Foods*. Check that the latest updates are included, i.e. all the supplements to the 5th edition as well as the 6th summary edition.

It is recommended that a hard copy of *The Composition of Foods* is available for ready reference to the Introduction, for an understanding of the basis of the figures, and to the Appendices, which provide useful details about the assumptions regarding weight changes and nutrient losses during cooking.

Many programmes will also include the American food tables (USDA) as well as other published databases, e.g. *The Composition and Nutrient Content of Foods Commonly Consumed by South Asians in the UK*. They may also include data from manufacturers and wholesalers, Italian database, Better Hospital Foods, dietary supplements, catering suppliers to NHS, gluten-free foods, and
nutritional supplements. It is essential that you are familiar with any differences between the supplied databases, such as the methods used to analyse nutrients such as fibre. Ensure that the supplied databases are kept up to date and that you have systems in place to do this.

It is unlikely that the databases supplied will contain all the foods that you want to incorporate into diets and recipes. Check the programme for ease of adding new foods into your own user database.

You may wish to have a copy of the MAFF (Food Standards Agency) Food Portion Sizes handbook (shown) to ensure your calculations are logical for the portions of food analysed.

Food databases are unlikely to contain specialist foods or dietary supplements (e.g. oral nutrition support products).

Therefore, check that the programme has the capacity for inputting your own foods if you anticipate adding recipes, new foods or supplements yourself.

**Fit for purpose**

As any dietitian will know, nutritional analysis is a time-consuming process and it is worth considering how you are likely to use a nutrition analysis software package in your particular business:

Do you need to buy the software or could you sub-contract business to another freelance dietitian who has expertise in this area?

**What do you require from a nutritional software package?**

Your software packages should allow you to:

1. Calculate the dietary intakes of individuals or groups for one meal, one day, one week, or more. Number of eating occasions per day can be selected as well as a number of days.

2. Calculate the complete nutrient content of recipes. Check that there is provision for weight loss or gain on cooking, allowance for nutrient losses, values for less common nutrients (e.g. non-milk extrinsic sugars). Conversion from imperial to metric units, volume to weight, and household measures to weight.

3. Analyse a complete menu. Ensure you can enter the all the days that you need, including courses and menu options and the programme will allow you to compare results to the standards that you need (DRV/EAR/RNI). Menus are commonly analysed by averaging the menu items offered by the number of clients. There are method available that will calculate the true nutrient mean. Check which method you need and that the software will provide you with this option.

4. Analyse food diaries for research purposes. All the required foods should be in the database for the experiment for complete accuracy. Check this is the case before starting.

**Results and reports**

Once you’ve completed your analysis you may need to send a report back to a client. Consider the following questions when comparing software packages:

- Are you likely to want to share information? How easy is it to send results to your clients by email attachments or in a spreadsheet?
Can recipes and menus be printed off and forwarded?

Is there a statistics package available? Can data or results be easily exported?

Can the results format be changed to suit your needs, for example to select nutrients or change standards or individual DRVs?

Can food costs be included – budgets of individuals, households or institutional kitchens – so that recipes and menus are costed? Can labour costs also be included if needed?

**Overall Cost**

Nutritional analysis packages are not inexpensive at all and you should budget for £300 upwards for the full package. Some are available for an ongoing monthly fee (e.g. Nutritics). There may also be additional costs (e.g. annual maintenance fee, software updates or support to technical support)

The cost of the programme you invest in is part of your business overheads and should be reflected in your pricing/fee structure to clients. If you are registered for VAT, take into account whether the software price includes VAT. You can reclaim this cost.

**Training**

Many programmes are written with the view that training is not necessary. When carrying out the software trial check that there is sufficient online help, a manual, or that the programme pages are self-explanatory.

**Recommended reading**

4. BDA website, Software List, www.bda.uk.com

Fact Sheets are available on request from the Membership Officer of the Freelance Dietitians Group. To obtain further information about the Freelance Dietitians Group contact the BDA website at www.bda.uk.com.