



Dana Casendino ('06) says her Madison Experience as a whole encouraged her to be a more well-rounded person. "I felt encouraged to get involved in various organizations and in the community, and that has definitely stuck with me in my career."

THE FIVE E'S OF HEALTH

Pediatric dietitian Dana Casendino ('06) combines nutrition and education to help parents improve kids' health BY HALI CHIET ('07)

For Dana Casendino ('06), being a pediatric dietitian isn't just about caring for patients — it's also about educating patients and their families. "I often see patients who just aren't aware of proper nutrition and that can lead to various health problems," she says. "By simply educating people, many of these problems can be avoided."

After graduating from JMU with a B.S. in dietetics, Casendino completed a clinical internship at Geisinger Medical Center in Danville, Pa. The internship consisted of inpatient and outpatient work as well as a variety of assignments and presentations. "This experience gave me exposure to all the different areas of the hospital, which helped me decide what I wanted to specialize in," she says. "I knew right away that I wanted to work in pediatrics."

Casendino completed the internship in June 2007 and then took a job at Westchester Medical Center in New York. During the year she spent at Westchester, Casendino worked in various areas of the hospital including the maternity floor, a high-risk infectious disease clinic and the internal medicine floor, where she put together meal plans and educated patients on proper nutrition. When she saw an opening for a pediatric dietitian at Hackensack University Medical Center in New Jersey, she was eager to apply. "I have always wanted to work with kids, so I applied immediately."

The staff noticed Casendino's knowledge, skills and enthusiasm and offered her the position in June 2008. As a pediatric dietitian, Casendino works with a team of doctors, nurses and specialists to incorporate a proper diet plan for each patient's diagnosis. She covers the general pediatrics floor, epilepsy monitoring unit and pediatric intensive care unit, and also does a weight management clinic for obese children and a clinic for children with renal disease. "The best part of my job is seeing that something I did for a patient actually made a difference," she says. "The fact that I am able to have a positive impact on the health of my patients is really rewarding."

In addition to her full-time job, Casendino teaches a nutrition class at a local gym, and also works with children with epilepsy and other seizure disorders, implementing diets that help control seizures, as well as special diets for those with weight issues caused by medication. In June, Casendino spoke to an epilepsy support group about proper nutrition for children who suffer from seizures.

"My job is the best of both worlds," explains Casendino, who combines her love of working with kids with her passion for nutrition and education. Casendino says JMU's dietetics program was great preparation for her career: "The program exposes you to all the career areas you can focus on and gives you a strong foundation in each of them."

Casendino says that she would like to get even more involved in her community and in school programs to get kids participating in their own nutrition education. "By teaching proper nutrition when kids are young, we can help slow down today's childhood obesity epidemic and make positive change in today's youth."

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— **DANA CASENDINO ('06),**
pediatric dietitian

To lead children on a path to being healthy adults, Casendino tells parents to focus on the "Five E's" of health:

1 ENVIRONMENT

Set children up for success, not failure! Make sure the house is filled with fresh foods to provide kids with the energy they need to get through their busy days. We cannot expect children to make good decisions if they are only surrounded by quick fixes. I always encourage parents to invite their children to join them on the next trip to the grocery store so they can help pick out some new and exciting healthy foods.

2 EDUCATION

Don't preach to children, teach them. Unfortunately many elementary and middle schools are lacking nutrition education so parents have to play a bigger role in teaching their children the right things to eat. Pick a new color of fresh food to focus on every week, read food labels or whip up a new recipe together. This will not only provide you with some quality time with your kids, but it will also provide them with the tools to make the right decisions in the future.

3 EXAMPLE

As much as they may deny it, sometimes kids are their parents' No. 1 fans. It's unfair to expect certain behavior from our children that we do not expect from ourselves. Lead by example and you will get the best followers.

4 EXERCISE

Emphasize that eating healthfully is only half the battle. Exercise and eating right go hand in hand for good health. Make physical activity fun for both you and your children by participating in a variety of family-oriented activities such as bicycling, soccer, swimming or relay races.

5 ESTEEM

Emphasize that staying active and eating for health is not about looking good; it is about feeling good and appreciating our bodies and minds. Feeling good comes from treating ourselves well — and being happy with the outside will start by how we treat the inside.