

# Today's Dietitian

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## GET TO KNOW ...



### LISA DRAYER Nutrition, Media, and Beauty From the Inside Out

By Lindsey Getz

Though she started out as a premed student, Lisa Drayer, MA, RD, admits she hated the sight of blood and wasn't sure how she would reconcile that fear as a doctor. She had always loved the analytical aspect of studying science—and she particularly loved the research—but she wasn't crazy about the “hands-on” aspect of practicing medicine.

During the summer after her freshman year, Drayer met with a nutritionist about dropping the “freshman 15” she'd gained. She was intrigued by what she heard and learning that being a nutritionist involved research and a good understanding of the sciences. That's when Drayer decided she would transfer from University of Michigan to Cornell University to pursue a degree in nutrition.

After graduating at the top of her class, Drayer went on to complete the dietetic internship at Brigham and Women's Hospital. However, she admits she was disillusioned from what she had envisioned her career to be.

“Suddenly everything I had disliked about medicine was presenting itself in the clinical setting,” Drayer says. “It was a very difficult year for me. I had studied nutrition and been incredibly passionate about it and suddenly I wasn't sure if I had made the right choice.”

But she powered through, earned her credentials, and ultimately took a job counseling patients in a medical office and began seeing private clients on the side. She was happier but still hadn't found her true calling. Having heard about a master's in science journalism program, she decided to give it a shot, and that's where Drayer says her vision for her future finally came together. After obtaining a journalism degree, Drayer took an editorial manager position at an online diet website called DietWatch.com. During this time, she was asked to appear on CNN for several nutrition topics. For several years she did television work on the side—getting into the CNN studio around 5 AM before going to her editorial job.

From these occasional appearances, Drayer's future was born. She became a regular contributor at CNN and the go-to dietitian for the network's primetime programming. She also created and developed CNN's “Breakfast With Daybreak” segment, producing and delivering health and nutrition reports for CNN's flagship morning show and concurrently appearing on CNN's sister network Headline News. During this time, Drayer also penned two books: *The Beauty Diet: Looking Great Has Never Been So Delicious* and *Strong, Slim, and 30!: Eat Right, Stay Young, Feel Great, and Look Fabulous*. She has appeared on numerous other television and radio shows, written for a variety of magazines, and earned the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' Media Excellence Award for her dedication to journalism.

Today, she works for CNN Health and is focused on its digital content. This includes a lot of writing as well as video work. However, Drayer says her greatest job of all is being a mom to two girls, Brooke, age 8, and Elle, age 5, who keep her quite busy. She lives in Manhattan with her husband and daughters while spending summers on Long Island at the family's Southampton home.

“I can write from anywhere and I love the summer break from the city,” Drayer says. “I get to swim and spend quality time all summer long with the girls while still making sure I file my assignments on time. It's the best of both worlds for me.”

#### **Today's Dietitian (TD): Is there any such thing as a typical day for you?**

**Drayer:** No, not really. My job allows me the flexibility to be the type of mom I want to be—and that comes first for me. Today, for instance, I was able to go to the Central Park Zoo for a field trip with my daughter before coming into my office to work on some writing projects. So, no day is truly typical. But a good chunk of my day is generally spent on writing. I turn in articles on a weekly basis, and that requires structured time in my office or a local library, where a lot of writers go because it's so quiet you can hear a pin drop.

On a shoot day, it's much different. I have to arrive by 7:45 AM and be in the studio by 9 AM with hair and makeup already done. Then I generally have an hour to shoot before the next show has to come in. I don't use a teleprompter, so it's quite challenging, as we have to get things done smoothly and quickly! My days ebb and flow in terms of intensity, and that keeps it interesting. But my favorite part of the day is walking one of my daughters to school—my husband walks our other daughter. And I try to be there for pick-up, too. We often like to cook together and then share dinner as a family. A lot of it is working around their schedule, which may mean working again after they go to sleep.

As often as I can, I also like to fit in a workout. That might mean taking a yoga class, doing Pilates, going for a walk or jog around the reservoir in Manhattan, or playing tennis.

### **TD: What do you like to cook with the girls?**

**Drayer:** They love helping me cook and bake, and we do a lot of it on the weekends. They're at such a fun age and they wear their little aprons and just have a lot of fun with it. One of their favorite things to make is ricotta gnocchi—rolling the balls is a lot like playing with Play-Doh. That's their favorite recipe, and I like it too because it's lighter than potato gnocchi. I also like making healthy mac n' cheese that has mushrooms and spinach. And we recently made a vegan avocado lime dessert that everyone liked. Cooking with my kids gives me first-hand experience of ways to help children eat healthfully. I write a lot about it and now I get to experience it—and that often gives me a lot of ideas for articles or television segments. They're good sports about it and enjoy helping me.

### **TD: Do you like to dine out as well?**

**Drayer:** Absolutely. I usually like to order a salad and a piece of fish when I dine out, but I won't deprive myself if there's something really indulgent on the menu that I want to try. I'll just ask for a half portion or plan to take some of it home. I love food and I believe strongly in portion control. Eating is one of life's pleasures, and being able to try new things and delicious dishes is something I enjoy. I always save room for some dessert when I dine out.

### **TD: What's your favorite dessert?**

**Drayer:** I love a scoop of salted caramel ice cream or gelato. I just feel like cake or pie is often too much after a meal. But a tasty scoop of ice cream or even sorbet changes the palate and feels light and refreshing.

### **TD: You mentioned that media work was your true calling. What do you like so much about it?**

**Drayer:** I'm an educator at heart. I love the idea of teaching. My goal has always been to translate complex science into language that people can understand and apply to their lives. That was the essence of my journalism training. It also requires some analytical skill, which has always been a

strength. In general, the messaging about being healthy or being "well" is also consistent with what has always resonated with me and my beliefs. If I had to define my platform, or what I'd consider my calling card, it would be beauty from the inside out. I read a lot of studies when I wrote the beauty book and I feel like one piece to inner beauty is nutrition—but that's just one extension of it. As a wife and a mother, the idea of inner beauty resonates strongly with me and I appreciate the opportunity to convey a healthy message about what beauty means within the media.

### **TD: Is there anything you find especially challenging about working in the media?**

**Drayer:** The media is a tough field in that it lacks a degree of continuity or more defined "ladder" you might get from other industries. There are so many changes and paths it can take—even on a daily basis—and there is a lot of unknown. But in a sense, I think that's a heightened sense of what life is all about. On some level, none of us knows where our lives are truly headed. As a mom, I feel as though I deal with a lot of unknowns. One day, one of my girls might wake up not feeling well and they're unable to go to school, and I have to drop everything and figure out a solution to make that day work. If you think about it this way, media is a template for life. I feel like it prepared me for being a mom in that way—in the sense that I feel more confident about handling the uncertainty. I never know what each day may hold, but I'm prepared to tackle it.

### **TD: What advice do you have for RDs who would like to pursue a media career like yours?**

**Drayer:** I would say it's important to give some thought as to what role you would like the media to play in your career. It could be writing or blogging in order to promote your own brand or business. It could be doing spokesperson work for companies that align with your brand. Or you could be working in the role of a traditional journalist, where it's less about your own opinion and more about covering different sides of a story through an objective lens. Each of these roles will have its own set of priorities and allegiances, and it's important to know that. Also, consider the skills required in each role. Speaking in front of the camera, especially live, is very different from researching or writing at a desk.

It's also important to be focused and persistent. It can take many efforts over time before you end up in the role you wish for, but it will pay off if you continue to be true to yourself and align yourself with opportunities that make sense for your goals. Finally, it's important to develop a thick skin. Don't take things too personally, and don't let rejection get you discouraged—it often has nothing to do with your personal circumstances, so pick yourself up and go where the door is open!

— Lindsey Getz is a freelance writer based in Royersford, Pennsylvania.