



MELISSA HALAS



MA, RDN, CDE

MEET MELISSA

Background:
East Coast to West Coast

Career:
Clinical to Cook Books

Advice for aspiring
entrepreneurs

The importance of staying
active in your state Academy



ABOUT MELISSA

Melissa Halas, MA, RDN, CDE, has always had a passion for nutrition education and working with kids. She became interested in nutrition early in life due to her own personal battle with food allergies. In 2006, after years of working in clinical nutrition, she decided to launch her own website and educational materials called SuperKids Nutrition.

When talking about school nutrition, Melissa emphasized that, "kids spend most of their waking hours at school. If we want to create healthier kids, communities and a thriving nation, we need to meet them where they are! Schools are like centers for the community. We know engaging parents in their child's education leads to better academic success. The same goes for good nutrition and fitness. Engaging parents and teachers about good health choices helps them model good choices for their kids and students."

Melissa, who is originally from Philadelphia, lives in Pasadena, California. Her love for staying active, gardening, and cooking fuels her creativity when the pen hits the paper. Learn more about Melissa and her career in making communities healthier!

CAREER PATH

I've been a dietitian for over 20 years, so it's been a diverse career path. I started off in clinical and worked as a clinical nutrition manager but also counseled and taught nutrition courses online at colleges too. I've been a preceptor and mentor for as long as I've been a dietitian and find it rewarding and inspiring.

I decided to start SuperKids Nutrition in 2006 after having a little girl. I couldn't find evidence based nutrition content online for new moms! I thought it would be challenging to tackle and a needed resource. I knew I wanted to make a strong impact, so SuperKids Nutrition partnered with large organizations that had a big reach.

SuperKids Nutrition partnered with Healthy Dining Finder and through a Centers for Disease Control funded grant we were able to focus group test the Super Crew characters in high- and low-income groups. It was incredibly rewarding to have them validated after seeing the positive response from kids in the classroom. For those of you who are not familiar, the Super Crew gets superpowers from healthy colorful plant-foods, with each multi-cultural character representing a specific color of food and its unique health benefits..

After seeing the impact that SuperKids Nutrition had, we then partnered with the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR.org). We developed the nutrition curriculum (activities, behavior change trackers, lesson plans, recipes, food photography, content for parents) for the Healthy Kids Today, Prevent Cancer Tomorrow Campaign and the Activate Your Summer Shield Program. These curricula featured the Super Crew. We also provide nutrition newsletters for parents and Super Crew activities on the back of menus for schools in 40 states.

My newest book is The Super Crew's Breakfast Cookbook for Kids. It contains 50 tasty breakfast recipes and 100 nutrition activities to inspire kids to explore a variety of yummy, colorful foods from nature. The book is divided into sections by character, so kids really start to learn and understand the colors of foods, the benefits of those foods, and how they can taste delicious in popular breakfast ideas!

I love keeping up to date with research and I'm inspired by motivating others to live their healthiest life.



ADVICE FOR ENTREPRENEURS

It's been quite a journey – I feel like Super Crew are my kids, and one is actually named after my daughter, Super Baby Abigail. My background in teaching functional foods inspired me to create the Super Crew. I wanted to create a book for parents, teachers, or health educators looking to teach kids about nutrition in fun and engaging ways through the familiar voices of our widely popular Super Crew. My clients always love the recipes and fun information I provide about colorful foods in our counseling sessions, so I wanted to give them some handy resources, and figured I could have an even greater reach with a series of books!

I'm continuing my journey inspiring kids and families to help more families and share the importance of good nutrition. Disease prevention starts at a young age, so we need to be teaching children and families at a time when they can form good behaviors.

My advice for fellow DPG members who are interested in paving their own path is to build your network and never be afraid to ask for advice. Whether it's a friend, a colleague, or someone you've never met, the dietetic community is more times than not, going to be happy to help. Join Facebook groups that match your goals, take online courses from other dietitians, listen to webinars, and consider being a preceptor. Stay connected to the people you meet and take interest in their accomplishments!

STAY ACTIVE IN YOUR STATE ACADEMY!

As I was building my company, I wanted to stay connected to the nutrition community.

I started out volunteering in the LA dietetic district as president of their association, then became the media rep several years later for CAND. I am also a member of many additional DPGs.

I knew it was important to stay involved to further the field, and to also inspire and motivate new dietitians to make their mark from the beginning. Continuing education and involvement are also extremely important so that dietitians stay up to date with the ever-changing field – knowing how to debunk many of the false messages in many media channels. The information we know about food, nutrients, and the body is really just getting started. Doing the most we can to contribute to that growth will help more and more people realize the importance of eating well and living a healthy lifestyle.

