

Nursing

- No matter how the world evolves, it will always need nurses.
- Right here in the U.S., qualified nurses are needed not just for bedside care, but for leadership roles, education and advocacy. As patient numbers grow and the population ages, compassionate, savvy nurses have an opportunity to make a difference. Keep reading to learn how to become a nurse.
- **Steps to Becoming a Nurse**
 - One of the first steps to becoming a nurse is getting a solid education, whether you hope to be an LPN, RN or administrator. Every state and the District of Columbia require students to graduate from an approved nursing program in order to become licensed.
 - Step one. Choose a Nursing path can take you in many directions, from a staff nurse to a head nurse. Or, from working as a CNA to working your way up to nurse educator.
 - When choosing your career path, think about the type of work environment you prefer. For example, RNs can be found in hospitals, doctors' offices and other medical settings, but certified nursing assistants often work in nursing homes. What type of setting will inspire you most?
 - Because there are so many facets to health care, nurses often specialize in certain areas, such as geriatrics or critical care. If you have a passion for a certain type of nursing, consider the type of schooling you'll need to get there.
 - Step two. Earn a Degree: The career path you're interested in pursuing will typically dictate the type of nursing degree you need. Nursing programs include classroom instruction as well as clinical experience. The latter will allow you to gain hands-on knowledge, ask questions in real-life scenarios and connect with nurses. The experience will also give you the chance to observe how a medical facility runs.
 - Before choosing a program, determine how nursing school will fit in to your busy life. Will you have time to get to campus? Many nursing bachelors and master's degrees can be earned online (with clinical requirements completed in your local community).
 - An associate's degree program takes less time to complete, allowing you to enter the workforce sooner. The downside? Employers may be more apt to hire a nurse with a bachelor's degree because they received a more in-depth education. However, plenty of nurses with ADNs go on to earn higher degrees with the help of tuition reimbursement from their employer.
 - The following list details the types of nursing degrees available:

- Nursing diplomas are offered at community colleges and vocational schools.
 - Associate's degree in nursing (ADN) can be earned at community colleges.
 - Bachelor's degree in nursing (BSN) are available at colleges and university.
 - Master's degree in nursing (MSN) are available at colleges and university.
 - Doctoral degrees (DNP, ND, PhD, DNSc) are available at colleges and university.
- Step three. Get Licensed: Once you complete your education, you'll need to take an exam to demonstrate your knowledge and nursing skills. The exams, and the topics covered, differ based on career path.
 - To become a licensed certified nursing assistant (CNA), you'll need to pass a state competency exam.
 - Licensed practical nurses (LPNs) must pass the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-PN).
 - RNs are required to take the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN) to earn licensure.
 - Nurse practitioners must pass a national certification exam administered by a professional organization, such as the American Nurses Credentialing Center or the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners.
 - Upon completing their education, nurse midwives should pass the exam administered by the American Midwifery Certification Board (AMCB).
- **After you become a nurse...**
 - Continuing education: Nurses are required to complete continuing education courses, usually every two years. Check with your state nursing board for requirements.
 - Earn an advanced degree: Earning a master's degree will qualify you for a career as a nurse practitioner, clinical nurse specialist, certified nurse midwife and certified nurse anesthetist.
 - Get certified: If you decide to specialize in a certain area of nursing, consider earning professional certification. This cements your commitment to the field and demonstrates your skill set to employers.
 - **For the Career Changer: Accelerated BSNs**
 - You want to become a nurse, but your background is in finance. No problem. Not all RNs start out in nursing. Motivated by job dissatisfaction, salary and other reasons, some RNs choose to head back to school and earn a bachelor's degree in nursing, but who has the time and money to invest in another four years of school? Enter the accelerated BSN.
 - Accelerated BSNs are designed specifically for students who have already earned a bachelor's degree in another field.

- While you may have to complete certain science and math prerequisites, accelerated BSN students aren't required to take general education courses again. Instead, the accelerated program (usually about 18 months) focuses solely on nursing skills. Students graduate with a BSN and should be prepared to take the NCLEX-RN.
- **Career Changes Within Nursing**
 - Nursing is infamously rewarding and challenging at the same time. After years of bedside care, some nurses look for a career switch within the field. Often, going back to school is the way to make a change.
 - **Specialize:** Earning a master's degree allows you to choose a specialty such as midwifery or informatics. If an MSN isn't what you're looking for, enroll in a certificate program, which takes less time to complete. You can choose from a variety of nursing specialties.
 - **Teach:** If you enjoy guiding new nurses in the workplace, you might be a good fit as a nurse educator. Colleges and universities hire nurses who hold a master's or doctorate to teach nursing courses.
 - **Research:** A Doctor of Nursing Philosophy (PhD) qualifies you to work in medical research. Your work could help make advances in the nursing profession.
- **Levels of Nursing**
 - There are few career paths that offer the same opportunities for advancement and career diversity as nursing. A complex health care system creates a wide range of options for nurses. And, as more patients look for specialized approaches, nurses can fill this demand by gaining more education, which often equates to a higher salary.
 - **Entry-level Nursing**
 - Entry-level nursing offers several career paths. Which one suits your goals?
 - **Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)**
 - **Job duties:** CNAs help patients with daily tasks, such as bathing and feeding. They also answer patient calls, clean rooms and are responsible for recording information and reporting issues to a nurse.
 - **Degree needed:** Post-secondary certificate or diploma (four and 12 weeks)
 - **Median annual salary*:** \$25,090
 - **Become a CNA if** You want to join the nursing field quickly and gain valuable on-the-job experience.
 - **Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN)**
 - (Licensed Vocational Nurse in Texas and California)
 - **Job duties:** Under the supervision and instruction of an RN, LPNs provide patients with basic care, including dressing, changing bandages and bathing. Some LPNs are permitted to administer medication but this depends on state regulations.
 - **Degree needed:** Certificate or diploma (one year)

- Median annual salary: \$42,490
 - Become an LPN if you want to work in nursing sooner rather than later, but hope to become an RN one day. Many RN degree programs give credit for LPN experience.
- **Registered Nurse**
 - Job duties: RNs coordinate patient care, administer medication, assist doctors with exams and surgeries, educate patients, promote wellness and manage other nurses and LPNs.
 - Degree needed: Associate's (two years) or bachelor's (four years)
 - Median annual salary: \$66,640
 - Become an RN if you're interested in a diverse work experience, potential career growth and further educational opportunities.
- **Advanced Nursing**
 - Advanced nursing programs require students to hold a bachelor's degree before enrolling. Many students earn their BSN from one school and attend a different school for their MSN. However, bridge programs allow students to earn two degrees at the same time from one school. An RN-to-MSN curriculum is designed in a way that students receive their undergraduate education first and then move on to MSN courses.
- **Nurse Midwife**
 - Job duties: Nurse Midwives provide prenatal, postpartum and newborn care. You'll guide and support women throughout their pregnancy. Nurse midwives also educate women and families about health and wellness. If major complications arise, you'll refer women to a physician.
 - Degree needed: Master's degree (two years)
 - Median annual salary: \$96,970
 - Become a nurse midwife if you want to specialize in health care for women and infants.
- **Nurse Practitioner (NP)**
 - Job duties: NPs serve as primary care providers to patients of all backgrounds. Nurse practitioners can diagnose illnesses and prescribe medication, but part of the job of an NP is to educate patients about preventative care as well.
 - Degree needed: Master's degree (two years)
 - Median annual salary: \$95,350
 - Become a nurse practitioner if you're interested in providing more comprehensive care to patients.
- **Nursing Informatics**
 - Job duties: Training other nurses on new technology is just one part of a nursing informatics job. You'll also spend time on system development, quality control and finding new ways to use data. Patient confidentiality is key as is efficiency in the workplace.
 - Degree needed: Bachelor's (four years) or master's (two years)

- Average annual salary: \$82,710 for clinical informatics coordinators, as part of the larger group of computer systems analysts
 - Become a nurse informatics specialist if you want to combine your tech-savviness with an advanced nursing career.
 - **Nurse Leadership / Medical and Health Services Managers**
 - Job duties: From creating work schedules to managing finances, nurse administrators juggle many responsibilities. You'll manage the nursing staff, but also analyze service, look for ways to cut costs and monitor the use of resources.
 - Degree needed: Bachelor's (four years) or master's (two years)
 - Median annual salary \$92,810
 - Become a nurse administrator if You want to be instrumental in improving patient care while managing the business side of a medical facility.
- **Job Outlook for Nurses**
 - According to the American Nurses Association (ANA), there are more than 3.1 million registered nurses in the United States. Yet, there's still room for more.
 - By 2024, it's expected the RN workforce will see an increase of 439,300 jobs, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). When you factor in the number of nurses who will leave the field during this time, there could be more than 1 million job openings by then.
 - It's common to hear about America's nursing shortage, but also be warned the job market is tight. If you're interested in becoming a nurse, which story should you believe?
 - The answer isn't black and white. Here's a look at the factors that make both scenarios true.
 - **Positive Factors**
 - More Jobs: Nursing shortages exist in some areas of the country
 - Spurred by the Affordable Care Act, more patients enter the health care system
 - Baby Boomers are living longer, in need of care
 - Specialized nursing is growing
 - **Negative Factors**
 - Less Jobs: Nursing surpluses exist in some parts of the country
 - Employers implement hiring freezes or layoffs due to recession
 - Nurses delay retirement
 - Interview process is rigorous and competitive
- **Where should you look for growth?**
 - In an ANA 2013 survey, respondents said they see increased opportunities in primary care, public health and advanced practice as drivers of future change in nursing.

- **Want to make yourself more marketable? Here are a few tips:**
 - Learn another language: Many hospitals seek out nurses who speak more than one.
 - Get certified: If you have expertise in a specialized area, secure professional certification.
 - Be flexible: Be open to working for different employers, even if you have your heart set on one in particular. The experience you gain will be priceless

- **How to Find Jobs as a Nurse**
 - You've graduated from school. Now, you need to know how to find jobs as a nurse. While you can take the traditional route of sending resumes to employers and hope for a call, there are savvy options that could help you land a nursing job. It's important to note that new nurses sometimes have difficulty since employers often look for more experienced staff.
 - **Networking**
 - In most careers, including nursing, it's about who you know. Start by joining your local chapter of the American Nurses Association. By attending events held by the chapter, you'll have an opportunity to meet nurses in your area. Make contacts with others and if there's a job opening at their workplace, they might think of you first.
 - Specialized nursing associations, such as the Emergency Nurses Association or the National Association of School Nurses, also have chapters.
 - Another networking option? Join a registered nurse meetup in your area.
 - **Find States with Nursing Needs**
 - Some states are hit harder by the nursing shortage than others. If you're not tied to your current location, moving to a state that needs nurses could potentially open doors to job opportunities.
 - Research shows that certain states will see a shortage in the coming years, while only two states will experience a surplus (Massachusetts and South Dakota).
 - **Military Nursing Jobs**
 - The military is another avenue nurses can take as they build their career. A few possible job opportunities within the military include critical care nursing, OBGYN nursing, family nurse practitioner and public health nursing.
 - As a military nurse on active duty, you may work overseas, on a ship or on a base. You can also choose to enlist in the reserves. This allows you to continue working at home and only serve when you're needed.

- Concerned about how you'll pay off your nursing school loans? As a nurse in the military, you may qualify for loan repayment.
 - **Become a Health Care Volunteer**
 - Volunteering is another networking opportunity. Giving your time to a health care facility not only gives you experience working with patients in a medical environment, but you'll meet other health care professionals.
 - If you plan to choose a nursing specialty, look for volunteer opportunities in that area. While you won't be paid for your time, treat the experience as you would a job. Making a good impression could mean a career connection in the future.
 - **Making Connections during Clinicals**
 - When it's time for you to complete clinical rounds during school, you'll likely be assigned to a hospital where you'll shadow a nurse (preceptor). During this period, be an attentive learner and showcase a positive attitude. Make connections with your preceptor and even their managers. If a position opens up, they may be more willing to recommend you for the job.
 - Once your clinical ends, stay in touch with your preceptors as they may be a good resource for job opportunities.
- **Informatics**
 - Nursing informatics gets more attention in today's technology-obsessed world, but the discipline has been around for several decades. In the 1980s, nurse informatics specialists dreamed of big things:
 - "We envisioned such things as minimal time spent in documentation, working together with patients to document past history and care received, a lifetime healthcare record, and the use of aggregated data to improve nursing practice." "Informatics, we believed, would free nurses and other healthcare professionals to spend more time with patients and minimize the pain of documentation.
 - While informatics has certainly changed the nursing landscape, experts say there is more work to be done. As electronic health records and mobile technology become the norm, nurse informatics is a field full of possibilities.
- **Virtual Nurse**
 - Nurses have plenty of stories to share about patients treating a health problem based on information they found on the Internet. As a virtual nurse, you can provide valid, accurate guidance and care online or over the telephone. While the job mostly deals with basic care, virtual nurses may also specialize in a certain area.
 - Virtual nurses need at least an ADN or BSN and should be good communicators.
- **Nurse Midwives**
 - Nurse midwives go beyond delivering babies; they also work as primary care providers for women and newborns. Because of their versatility, more nurse

midwives are needed. The BLS expects 29 percent job growth through 2024, which is faster than average.

- According to the National Library of Medicine, nurse midwives have been instrumental in improving primary health care services for women in inner-city and rural areas of the country. There's even more good news: The National Institute of Medicine recommends that nurse midwives should have a larger role in providing women's health care.
- **Travel Nursing**
 - Travel nursing was created as a solution to the nursing shortage and remains a popular option for adventurous types. While some nurses are placed in beautiful locales, you may also be placed in an emergency situation or disaster zone. During a strike, a travel nurse may be called to fill the role of a regular employee. RNs work with an agency who match them with a short-term assignment in another city or country. Flexibility and the ability to adapt to new surroundings easily are necessary criteria.
 - Travel nursing tends to offer higher-than-average pay and housing may be provided.
 - To find travel nursing jobs, go online. You'll find different agencies, such as TravelNursing.org, who match nurses with job opportunities.
- **Nurse Educator**
 - Share your experience and knowledge with aspiring nurses. According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), more than 68,000 qualified nursing school applicants were turned away in 2014 partly due to faculty shortages.
 - AACN says the next decade will see a significant number of faculty retirements, creating vacancies at campuses across the country. Also contributing to the shortage is too few job candidates with a master's or doctorate degree.
 - Want to educate others and join a growing area of nursing? Consider earning an advanced degree.
- **Nurse Advocate**
 - The health care system can be a complicated maze to navigate for patients which is why nurse advocacy careers are surging. Health educators and community health workers, such as nurse advocates, are expected to see job growth of 13 percent through 2024.
 - As a nurse advocate, you'll represent a patient, help them understand their diagnosis, assist with insurance and be the liaison between the patient and doctor. There may be instances where a patient's beliefs won't allow for a certain treatment. A nurse advocate will work with the doctor to find a solution.
- **Home-care Nurse**
 - Hospital stays may have gotten shorter, but patients still need care once they're discharged. This is why home-care nursing is experiencing a boost in employment. Another factor? Advances in technology allow patients to receive more elaborate treatments at home.

- As a home-care nurse, your patients will have a variety of backgrounds; you may treat older people, new moms, patients recovering from an accident and those with chronic illnesses.
- If you prefer to work outside a hospital and build relationships with a regular set of patients, a home-care nurse career could be a good fit.
- **Case Management Nurses**
 - The number of older people in the U.S. is increasing which has created opportunity for case management nurses. As people live longer, it's more likely they'll cope with chronic or long-term illnesses that require expert advice and guidance.
 - Case management nurses organize the type of care a patient will receive, monitor costs and resources and ensure patients and families are supported.
 - As a case management nurse, you'll have the unique opportunity of providing patient care while also serving as an important decision-maker.
- **Geriatric Nurse**
 - The National Council on Aging estimates about 80 percent of older adults have a chronic condition. Combine this with the aging baby boomer population and it spells employment growth for geriatric nurses.
 - While many tasks of a staff RN will be the same for a geriatric nurse, you'll also focus on treating conditions more prevalent in old age, such as cancer, Alzheimer's disease and osteoporosis. Since some elderly patients may have trouble communicating their wishes, you'll also serve as a patient advocate.
- **Critical Care Nurse**
 - Agility and good decision-making skills are crucial as a critical care nurse. Many work in a hospital's Intensive Care Unit, or ICU, treating patients suffering from burns, serious cardiac problems and other grave conditions.
 - As more hospitals expand their ICUs and nursing homes care for very sick patients, critical care nursing has become a growing specialty. Critical care nurses should be comfortable with advanced technology and working at a fast pace.
- **Health Information Systems and Nursing**
 - Emerging technology is changing the landscape of nursing and the use of Health Information Systems (HIS) is a regular discussion among health care providers. For many nurses, their first introduction to HIS is with an electronic health record (EHR), or a digital version of a patient's paper chart. It can include information from multiple providers, hospitals and specialists and can be accessed at any time of day. EHRs are designed to be confidential and secure.
 - EHRs have been a long-time coming. More than 10 years ago, President George Bush outlined a plan where most Americans would have an EHR by 2014. During President Barack Obama's presidency, \$30 billion was allotted as stimulus funds to help hospitals implement EHRs.