

# Pharmacy assistant

Pharmacy assistants help [pharmacists](#) [1] order, prepare and dispense medicines. See how you could use your customer service skills in a pharmacy.

## Working life

A pharmacy is where medicines are stored, prepared and dispensed. Medicines are the most common treatments offered to NHS patients.

Pharmacy assistants work as part of a pharmacy team under the direction of a registered [pharmacist](#) [1]. The work includes:

- taking in and handing out prescriptions
- dispensing prescriptions
- using computer systems to generate stock lists and labels
- ordering items
- receiving, loading, unloading deliveries
- delivering medicines to other parts of a hospital or health centre
- selling over-the-counter medicines
- answering customers questions face to face or by phone
- pre-packing, assembling and labelling medicines
- preparing medicines
- referring problems or queries to the pharmacist

Pharmacy assistants can also be involved in manufacturing medicines when ready-made preparations are not available. For example, certain cancer treatments and intravenous feeding solutions need to be tailor made under sterile conditions for individual patients.



Pharmacy assistants work as part of healthcare teams in hospitals or community pharmacies.

Some work in retail pharmacies in supermarkets or on the high street, or for other employers that provide NHS services. In community pharmacies they may be called dispensing assistants.

## Entry requirements

There are no set entry requirements to become a pharmacy assistant. Employers usually expect good literacy, numeracy and IT skills. They may ask for GCSEs or equivalent qualifications.

Employers often ask for relevant work experience. Even where this is not specified, it would be an advantage if you have worked in a customer service role.

## Skills and personal characteristics

Pharmacy assistants need to be:

It would be an advantage if you have worked in a customer service role

- accurate and methodical
- responsible
- able to pay attention to detail
- able to understand law and guidelines on medicines
- able to read and carry out instruction
- to be interested in people's health
- able to explain clearly to members of the public

They'll also need excellent communication, customer service, IT and manual skills.

## Training and development

You will be given the training you need to be a member of the pharmacy team. This includes health and safety, use of IT systems, manufacturing medicines and dispensing prescriptions.

You may be offered the chance to study for qualifications such as:

- NVQ level 2 in pharmacy service skills
- BTEC level 2 in pharmaceutical science

A level 2 apprenticeship for pharmacy services assistants is available in many parts of the country.

- Pay and conditions

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Pharmacy assistants working in the NHS will work standard hours of around 37.5 a week which may include shifts. They usually start in the NHS at band 2 or 3 of the [Agenda for Change\(AfC\)](#) [2] pay scale.

[Find out more about the pay and benefits of a career in the NHS.](#) [3]

Terms and conditions outside of the NHS will vary depending on the employer.

- Where the role can lead

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With experience, you could become a team leader or supervisor, overseeing the work of other assistants. Some experienced pharmacy assistants apply to train as a [pharmacy technician](#) [4].

- Job market and vacancies

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NHS trusts advertise their vacancies on [NHS Jobs](#) [5] and some advertise on their own websites. You can find a list of NHS organisations on the [NHS Choices](#) [6] website. You can also search for vacancies on the [Find an Apprenticeship website](#) [7]

Large retail pharmacies, including those in supermarkets, usually advertise for assistants on their own websites. From time to time individual high street pharmacies may also advertise locally for assistants.

If you're applying for a role either directly in the NHS or in an organisation that provides NHS services, you'll be asked to show how you think the NHS values apply in your everyday work.

[Find out more about NHS values.](#) [8]

- Further information

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- [National Pharmacy Association](#) [9]

## Other roles that may interest you

- [Experienced paramedic](#) [10]
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