

Chef/cook

Chefs and cooks are responsible for cooking food in NHS hospitals and other services making sure our patients and staff have highly nutritious, high quality food.

Working life

You'll work with the [catering manager](#) ^[1] to make sure that food and drink is nutritious and appetising. The food has to meet patients' medical and cultural needs including, for example, gluten free, low fat, soft food, halal and vegetarian.

cook with menu

As a cook or chef, your duties include:

- planning meals and menus
- preparing food
- using kitchen equipment such as mixers
- storing food correctly
- making sure as little as possible is wasted
- supervising kitchen assistants

As an assistant or catering support worker, you may:

- prepare food such as vegetables for the cook or chef
- wash up, by hand or using a dishwasher
- keep kitchen areas clean
- clear tables
- load meals onto trolleys to go to wards and other parts of the hospital
- serve meals to staff in a canteen or restaurant
- operate a till and handle cash

Rizal San Pedro

Chef

I just want to serve quality food. If I'm not happy with the food when I taste it in the kitchen then it doesn't go out. I'm always really proud of what I'm doing.

[Read Rizal's story](#) ^[2]

Pay and benefits

Cooks, chefs and assistants working in the NHS are paid on the [Agenda for Change \(AfC\)](#) ^[3] pay system. As a new entrant working as an assistant/catering support worker, you would typically start at the bottom of [AfC](#) ^[4] band 2 or at higher points of band 2 as a cook or chef. With further training and experience, you could apply for team leader positions at bands 3 and above.

Cooks, chefs and assistants in the NHS work standard hours of around 37.5 a week. They may work shifts including early starts, evenings, nights and weekends.

Terms and conditions will usually be different for cooks, chefs and assistants working outside of the NHS.

Apprenticeships logo

Who will I work with?

Chefs and cooks work as part of the catering team. In a large kitchen there may be a head chef or cook overseeing one or more assistant chefs or cooks. Catering assistants usually work in a team, with a team leader supervising them.

Chefs and cooks may have little or no contact with patients. Catering assistants may have some contact with patients, depending on where they work.

Entry requirements

To enter the NHS as a cook or chef, you need a catering qualification, usually at level 2 or 3.

Employers also expect catering experience.

Some cooks or chefs enter the NHS as catering assistants and take qualifications while they are working.

There are no set entry requirements for catering assistants. Employers expect a good standard of numeracy and literacy. They may ask for GCSEs in English and maths. It would be an advantage to have some experience of catering or customer service, from paid employment or voluntary work.

Skills needed

Chefs, cooks and assistants need to be:

- interested in food and cooking

- willing to work in hot, noisy conditions
- physically fit for standing, moving and lifting
- flexible and adaptable
- keen to provide good customer service

They also need

- awareness of food hygiene and food safety
- teamworking skills
- organisational skills

Training and development

If you join the NHS as a cook or chef you will be given the training you need to introduce you to the department and its systems and procedures. You are likely to have opportunities to take further qualifications which could include apprenticeships. You may also be expected to go on short courses in particular topics such as cooking for special diets.

As a catering assistant, you will be trained in food hygiene, health and safety and manual handling. You will be encouraged to take qualifications in catering and customers service.

Where the role can lead

With experience, catering assistants can become team leaders, supervising the work of a team of assistants. With further experience and qualifications, they can progress to become catering managers ^[1]. They could move into other areas such as facilities management ^[5] or housekeeping ^[6].

Chefs and cooks can progress by working in larger kitchens. With experience, they could become assistant head chefs or cooks, supervising the work of a team in the kitchen. They could progress further to become a head chef or cook running a kitchen.

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