Chef/cook

Chefs and cooks are responsible for cooking food for staff and patients in hospitals and other NHS services.

This page has information on the role of chefs and cooks in the NHS, including entry requirements and skills needed.

Working life

You will 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.

As a cook or chef, your duties include:

- planning meals and menus
- preparing food
- using kitchen equipment such as mixers
- storing food correctly
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

Who will I work with?

Chefs, cooks and assistants 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.

Food has to meet patients' medical and cultural needs including, for example, gluten free, low fat, soft food, halal and vegetarian.

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:

- making sure as little as possible is wasted
- supervising kitchen assistants
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. 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.

- **Pay and conditions**

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  Cooks, chefs and assistants working in the NHS are paid on the Agenda for Change (AfC) [2] pay system. As a new entrant working as an assistant/catering support worker, you would typically start at the bottom of AfC [3] 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.

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- **Where the role can lead**

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  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 [4] or housekeeping [5].

  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.

- **Job market and vacancies**

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Most NHS trusts advertise their vacancies on NHS Jobs [6] and some advertise on their own websites. You can find a list of NHS organisations: NHS Choices [7].

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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  - Institute of Hospitality [9]
  - Hospital Caterers Association [10]

**Other roles that may interest you**

- Catering manager [11]
- Domestic services staff [12]
- Housekeeper [13]
- Emergency care assistant [14]

**Source URL:** https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/wider-healthcare-team/roles-wider-healthcare-team/domestic-services/chef-cook-and-assistant

**Links**
[3] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#AfC
[8] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/working-health/nhs-constitution