

Respiratory medicine

Doctors working in [respiratory](#) ^[1] medicine diagnose and treat conditions affecting the [respiratory](#) ^[1] system, which includes the nose, throat, larynx, windpipe, lungs and the diaphragm.

One third of all acute medical admissions to hospital are the result of [respiratory](#) ^[1] problems, so you'll experience a busy and varied career.



Life working in [respiratory](#) ^[1] medicine

You'll diagnose, treat and provide continuous care for adults of all ages with a wide range of [respiratory](#) ^[1] and related conditions. It's an exciting and diverse specialty that requires a grounding in general medicine and expert [respiratory](#) ^[1] knowledge and interventional skills. It draws together elements of many other specialties including:

- oncology
- infectious diseases and public health
- immunology
- palliative care
- intensive care

Assessing patients in outpatients' clinics is an important part of your work. You'll spend time in both general [respiratory](#) ^[1] clinics and specialist clinics.

In a general [respiratory](#) ^[1] clinic, you'll see patients referred by their GP with symptoms such as breathlessness, cough or wheeze or who have an abnormal chest x-ray.

In a specialist [respiratory](#) ^[1] clinic, you'll deal with a range of problems including:

- asthma
- cancer
- cystic fibrosis (an inherited condition that causes sticky secretions in multiple organ systems including the lungs)
- interstitial lung disease (scarring of the lung tissue)
- pulmonary vascular disorders (affecting the circulatory system of the lungs)

- sleep related breathing disorders, for example obstructive sleep apnoea
- tuberculosis or TB (a bacterial lung disease)

You'll also be involved with physiological tests to assess lung function, which indicate how well a patient's lungs are performing and can involve anything from spirometry to exercise testing.

All [respiratory](#) ^[1] units deliver care for people with acute [respiratory](#) ^[1] disease, with some delivering specialist care for diseases, such as cystic fibrosis, pulmonary vascular diseases or lung transplant.

Traditionally a hospital-based role, more and more [respiratory](#) ^[1] services are delivered in the community, and you may be expected to work across both settings.

How much can I earn?

You'll first earn a salary when you start your [foundation training](#) ^[2] after medical school. Find out details of current salary ranges for foundation and specialty training, [SAS doctors](#) ^[3] and consultants on the [Pay for doctors](#) ^[4] page.

How about the benefits?

- make a difference
- flexible and part-time working
- high income early in your career
- work anywhere in the world
- excellent pension scheme
- good holiday entitlement
- NHS discounts in shops and restaurants

Must-have skills

- excellent communication skills to manage a relationships with colleagues, and patients and their families
- emotional resilience, a calm temperament and the ability to work well under pressure
- teamwork and the capacity to lead multiprofessional teams
- problem-solving and diagnostic skills
- outstanding organisational ability and effective decision-making skills
- first-class time and resource management for the benefit of patients

Entry requirements

Your first step is medical school. Typically, you'll need excellent GCSEs and three A or A* passes at A level including chemistry for a five-year undergraduate degree in medicine. Many medical schools also ask for biology and others may require maths or physics.

If you already have a degree, you could study for a four-year postgraduate degree in medicine.

You'll need to pass an interview and admissions test. You'll be asked to show how you demonstrate the NHS values such as compassion and respect.

Some medical schools look to recruit a mix of students from different backgrounds and geographical areas, so your educational and economic background and family circumstances could be considered as part of your application.

"Talking to patients is both a privilege and a delight. You can often make a diagnosis by just speaking to them and can make a huge difference to their stay in hospital by taking time to explore their feelings and engage with them and their family on a human level."

Read Tim's story ^[5].

What are my chances of starting a career in respiratory ^[1] medicine?

There are approximately 1240 consultants working in respiratory ^[1] medicine in the NHS in England. In 2020, there were 407 applications for 74 specialty training places.

How to become a doctor in respiratory ^[1] medicine

After medical school, you'll join the paid two-year foundation programme ^[6] where you'll work in six placements in different settings.

After your foundation programme, you can apply for General Internal Medicine (GIM) training which lasts for three years.

After completing GIM training, you can apply to specialty training ^[7] in respiratory ^[1] medicine, which takes four to five years.

You may be able to train part time, with many options for less than full time training available.

Where a career in respiratory ^[1] medicine can take you

Respiratory ^[1] medicine covers a broad range of disease areas, with opportunities to practise general respiratory ^[1] medicine or choose a sub-specialist interest such as:

- asthma
- cystic fibrosis
- interstitial lung disease
- lung transplantation
- lung cancer
- occupational and environmental lung disease
- sleep disordered breathing and non-invasive ventilatory support

You'll also have opportunities to conduct research and teach.

- **Live vacancies**

Find a vacancy

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- **Further information**

These organisations have further information about being a doctor in [respiratory](#) ^[1] medicine, particularly as your career progresses. Take a look.

[Royal College of Physicians](#) ^[8]

[Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh](#) ^[9]

[Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow](#) ^[10]

[British Thoracic Society](#) ^[11]

And hear from people working in [respiratory](#) ^[1] medicine:

[Specialty spotlight - respiratory medicine](#) ^[12]

[A career in respiratory medicine \(BMJ\)](#) ^[13]

[Dr Chris Davies, consultant in respiratory medicine \(RCP\)](#) ^[14]

[Dr Ahsan Akram – ST5, respiratory medicine \(RCPE\)](#) ^[15]

[Dr Gourab Choudhury – ST6, respiratory medicine \(RCPE\)](#) ^[16]

Other roles that may interest you

- [Gastroenterology](#) ^[17]
- [Intensive care medicine](#) ^[18]

- General internal medicine [19]
- Palliative medicine [20]

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