Summary

This article covers the following jobs:

- District Nurse
- Health Visitor
- Midwife
- Nurse - Adult/General
- Nurse - Children
- Nurse - Learning Disabilities
- Nurse - Mental Health
- Occupational Health Nurse
- School Nurse.

The job descriptions are only a brief summary. It is recommended that you do further research on jobs that interest you.

Branches of nursing

Nurses specialise in one of four areas, known as branches:

- adult nursing
- mental health nursing
- learning disabilities nursing
- children's nursing.

There are separate training courses for people who want to become midwives. It is also possible for qualified nurses (in the adult branch) to take further training to become midwives.

A nurse can also take further training, for example, to become a:

- district nurse
- health visitor
- occupational health nurse
- school nurse

What do the different types of nurse do?

Nurse - Children

Children's nurses care for babies, children, and teenagers. Working with doctors and other medical staff, they plan and put into practice the complete nursing care of their patients.

They meet the particular needs of children, for example, considering how an illness or injury will impact on their physical and emotional development.

They reassure children who are anxious or confused. They use observation skills to monitor children who cannot tell them how they feel or where they are in pain.

The practical nursing side of this job includes giving medication (such as injections), applying and changing dressings, and taking and recording measurements of things like blood pressure and temperature.

Children's nurses involve parents and carers in the treatment. They might teach them how to change dressings or give injections, for example. This means that the child can leave hospital earlier, with the treatment continuing at home.

Nurse - Adult/General
Adult/general nurses treat patients over the age of 16. They meet the physical and emotional care needs of their patients, who may have a short- or long-term illness or injury, or be disabled.

Within adult nursing, there are many areas of work. For example, nurses could be involved in cancer care, intensive care, recovery after operations or looking after older people.

They work in hospital wards and in many other places, including community health centres, GPs' surgeries, specialist clinics, prisons and private companies. Some nurses visit patients in their own homes.

Adult nurses plan how to meet the patient's care needs, working closely with doctors and other medical staff. They monitor the patient's progress, changing the plan if they need to.

Practical nursing might involve:

- checking temperatures
- giving drugs and injections
- helping doctors to examine patients
- dressing wounds and changing bandages.

Increasingly, the health service uses complex equipment to help with patient care, and nurses are often responsible for monitoring this. They also record their observations and any treatment they give.

**Nurse - Learning Disabilities**

Learning disability nurses care for and support clients with learning disabilities. They also enable clients to develop personal and social skills, increasing their independence and self-esteem.

They work in a number of areas, including community care homes, day centres, schools and clients' own homes.

Learning disability nurses provide basic care for people with severe learning disabilities. They support them in tasks such as washing, dressing and feeding themselves, and going to the toilet.

Nurses also enable clients to develop everyday skills, to improve their personal and social well-being. For example, they might train clients to use kitchen equipment, so they can make a drink, or take them shopping to improve their confidence in making lists and handling money.

**Nurse - Mental Health**

Mental health nurses care for and support people with mental illness. They help clients to come to terms with their illness, and identify when they are at risk of harming themselves or others.

They aim to build trusting relationships with their clients, encouraging them to discuss their feelings and listening to their points of view.

Mental health nurses must also involve the client's family or carers, keeping them up to date with treatment and progress, and increasing their confidence in how to help the client.

Apart from practical nursing care, they organise activities to maintain the client's independence and encourage their personal and social development.

Increasingly, mental health nurses work in the community, rather than in hospitals. They could be working with clients in their own homes, in small residential homes or local health centres, for example.

**District Nurse**

District nurses work with patients in their own homes and in the community, in places such as GPs' surgeries, clinics and care homes. For example, patients might be recently discharged from hospital, terminally ill or have a long-term sickness.

District nurses must assess each patient's needs and then make a plan to make sure they meet these needs. In planning and delivering nursing care, they have to work closely with other people such as doctors, care assistants and social workers.

Practical nursing might include giving medication and injections, changing dressings, checking temperature and
taking blood samples.

Giving emotional support can be a very important part of the work, for example, when working with patients who have a terminal illness or who have left hospital after an operation. District nurses also work with the patient's family or carer, advising them on health care and prevention of illness.

**Occupational Health Nurse**

Occupational health nurses promote the health, safety and well-being of people at work.

They assess workplaces for hazards such as dangerous chemicals and noise pollution, working with employers and staff to reduce or deal safely with these hazards.

A large part of the work involves health education. This could include:

- promoting good working practices such as how to lift heavy objects correctly
- setting up a display in the company canteen to encourage healthy eating
- teaching relaxation and stress management techniques.

Occupational health nurses regularly test and screen staff, for example, taking blood samples and measuring blood pressure. They also do medical tests on applicants for job positions.

An occupational health nurse might also be helping someone to return to work after a long-term illness or injury. They monitor their progress and advise them on how to manage their workload so they can ease themselves back to work gradually.

**Midwife**

Midwives care for pregnant women. They also care for babies, before, during and after the birth.

The midwife starts work with the mother soon after her GP confirms the pregnancy. The midwife gives the mother a health check and arranges for her to go for a scan, which can detect any problems with the development of the baby. If there are any problems, the midwife refers the mother to a specialist doctor.

As well as health care, the midwife provides emotional support for both the woman and her partner, advice on issues such as nutrition and pain relief, and information on what to expect at the birth and in the first few weeks afterwards.

The midwife carries out the delivery of the baby, making sure that everything progresses smoothly, and examines the baby when it has been born to make sure everything is all right.

**School Nurse**

School nurses look after pupils' health, and also teach them about issues such as healthy eating, exercise, smoking, drugs and safe sex.

They see children regularly to check and measure things such as height, weight and hearing. School nurses also immunise children against diseases.

They give talks and presentations in the classroom, and one-to-one advice, on all the health issues that can affect children. Apart from physical illnesses, they can be helping pupils to deal with issues including bullying, panic attacks, eating disorders and depression.

School nurses work closely with people such as teachers, parents, GPs and education welfare officers, as well as the pupils.

**Health Visitor**

Health visitors support, educate and advise families through pregnancy until the child's fifth birthday. They make sure families know about and can use support services. If need be, they refer families to other healthcare professionals, such as speech and language therapists.

One of their main responsibilities is checking the health and development of children from birth. They visit people in their own homes or carry out regular checks on children in local health clinics or children's centres. Health visitors give advice on issues such as feeding, diet, play, safety and immunisation. They also support the family as a whole, for example, advising mothers who have postnatal depression.
How do I train to become a nurse or midwife?

To qualify as a nurse, you must usually complete a pre-registration degree course in nursing.

Nursing degrees usually take three years to complete (four in Scotland). There are a small number of part-time degree courses for people employed as assistant practitioners in the NHS.

You might be able to use previous learning or practical experience to complete your degree in a shorter time. This is through accreditation of prior (experiential) learning or APEL. Some universities reduce the pre-registration time by as much as one year. Examples of previous learning might include a relevant degree subject or practical experience of nursing, care or a related area.

On your degree course, you’d spend the first year completing the Common Foundation Programme (CFP). This covers a general introduction to nursing and develops your observational, communication and caring skills.

From the second year of the course onwards, you would specialise in one of the four branches of nursing:

- adult nursing
- children’s nursing
- mental health nursing
- learning disability nursing.

Some courses have a general title, such as ‘nursing’, while others tell you which branch you will follow in the title, such as ‘nursing (adult)’. Some universities and colleges of higher education don’t offer all four branches after the CFP, so please check prospectuses carefully. There are also a small number of courses that combine nursing with a social work qualification.

Completing the degree will lead to registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (a requirement to practise in the UK).

There are also a small number of pre-registration MSc or postgraduate diploma courses, usually for graduates in health or science-related degrees (some universities consider graduates with any subject).

Direct training as a midwife is through a degree in midwifery. There are also some pre-registration postgraduate courses, usually for graduates with science- or health-related subjects (some universities accept other subjects). It is also possible to train first as an adult nurse and follow this with a shortened course in midwifery.

You might be able to enter a nursing or midwifery degree course after completing a foundation degree in a relevant subject.

It can be possible to enter a nursing or midwifery degree course after completing an Advanced Level Apprenticeship, for example, in Health and Social Care; Health - Clinical Healthcare Support; or Health - Allied Health Profession Support.

If you’re thinking of becoming a nurse and then training to be a midwife, district nurse or occupational health nurse later on, you should think carefully about which branch of nursing you train to do. It can be difficult to get on a training course if you have not gone through the adult nursing branch.

Which qualifications do I need?

For a degree in nursing, the usual entry requirement is:

- 3 A levels. Some universities ask for at least one science subject. Psychology and Sociology can be other preferred subjects.
- GCSEs at grade C and above in your A level subjects.
- A further 2/3 GCSEs at grade C and above. English and Maths might be specified. Some universities specify Biology or Science, especially if you don’t have Biology at A level.

Entry may also be possible with alternative qualifications such as a relevant NVQ level 3, Edexcel (BTEC) level 3 National, or the International Baccalaureate Diploma. Please check prospectuses carefully.

For entry to a degree in midwifery, the usual requirements are:

- 2/3 A levels. Some universities ask for a science subject; they might specify Biology.
GCSEs at grade C and above in your A level subjects.
A further 2/3 GCSEs at grade C and above. Specified subjects can be English, Maths and Science or Biology.

Again, equivalent qualifications can be acceptable. Please check prospectuses carefully.

### Further Information

### Contacts

- **Health Careers**
  Website: [www.nhscareers.nhs.uk](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk)

- **NHS Wales Careers**
  Publisher: National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare
  Email: abm.wedsteam@wales.nhs.uk
  Website: [www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/829/page/36090](http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/829/page/36090)

- **NHS Jobs**
  Website: [www.jobs.nhs.uk](http://www.jobs.nhs.uk)

- **NHS Education for Scotland (NES)**
  Scottish enquiries
  Address: Westport 102, West Port, Edinburgh EH3 9DN
  Tel: 0131 6563200
  Email: enquiries@nes.scot.nhs.uk
  Website: [www.nes.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk)

- **Step into the NHS**
  NHS careers
  Tel: 0345 6060655
  Website: [www.stepintothensh.nhs.uk](http://www.stepintothensh.nhs.uk)

- **Skills for Health**
  Skills for the health sector
  Address: Goldsmiths House, Broad Plain, Bristol BS2 0JP
  Tel: 0117 9221155
  Email: office@skillsforhealth.org.uk
  Website: [www.skillsforhealth.org.uk](http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk)

- **Royal College of Nursing (RCN)**
  Address: 20 Cavendish Square, London W1G 0RN
  Tel: 0345 7726100
  Website: [www.rcn.org.uk](http://www.rcn.org.uk)

- **Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland**
  Irish enquiries
  Address: 18-20 Carysfort Avenue, Blackrock, County Dublin
  Tel: 01 6398500
  Email: ncc@nursingboard.ie
  Website: [www.nursingboard.ie](http://www.nursingboard.ie)

- **Independent Midwives UK**
  Address: 4 Normanton Terrace, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE4 6PP
  Tel: 0845 4600105
  Email: information@independentmidwives.org.uk
  Website: [www.independentmidwives.org.uk](http://www.independentmidwives.org.uk)

- **Nursing and Midwifery Council**
  Address: 23 Portland Place, Marylebone, City of Westminster, London W1B
  Tel: 020 7637 7181
  Website: [www.nmc-uk.org](http://www.nmc-uk.org)
• Nursing Careers
  Tel: 0345 6060655
  Website: nursing.nhscareers.nhs.uk

• Royal College of Midwives (RCM)
  Address: 15 Mansfield Street, London W1G 9NH
  Tel: 0300 3030444
  Email: info@rcm.org.uk
  Website: www.rcm.org.uk

• Royal College of Midwives (RCM) Scotland
  Scottish enquiries
  Address: 37 Frederick Street, Edinburgh EH2 1EP
  Tel: 0300 3030444
  Email: info@rcm.org.uk
  Website: www.rcm.org.uk

• NHS Business Services Authority
  Website: www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk

Related Careers

• Health Visitor
• Nurse - Adult/General
• Nurse - Learning Disabilities
• Nurse - Mental Health
• Nurse - Children
• Midwife
• District Nurse
• School Nurse
• Occupational Health Nurse