# How to Prepare for a Nursing Career

It's never too early to start thinking about a career in nursing!

If you're a prospective nursing student still in high school, you can do a number of things to prepare yourself. First, talk to your school guidance counselor, who can point you in the direction of appropriate schools and help determine your course of study. Most nursing programs will look for two to four years of math and science, four years of English, one to two years of health studies, and some foreign language and computer science skills.

**Nurses need:**

* Leadership and organizational skills
* People skills
* Patience
* Flexibility
* Compassion
* Problem-solving skills
* A sense of humor
* The ability to stay calm in a crisis

**Nursing Careers**

Nursing is a career filled with endless personal and professional rewards. If you choose nursing, you are choosing to spend your life helping others, using skills that blend scientific knowledge with compassion and caring. There are few professions that offer such a rewarding combination of high tech and high touch. Nursing is the nation's largest health care profession, with 2.6 million registered nurses (RNs), and many more needed in the future. Nurses are the largest single component of any hospital staff - the primary providers of hospital patient care - and, they deliver most of the nation's nursing home care. They work in a variety of other settings as well.

With the aging population growing steadily, there will be no shortage of jobs for nurses well into the future. In most parts of the country, the average age of nurses is growing, meaning that more nurses are retiring, thus furthering the nursing shortage. So, as the current crop of Baby Boomer-age nurses nears retirement, fewer trained nurses are in the pipeline to replace them. This translates into more job opportunities with the potential of higher starting salaries. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of May 2016 there are 2,857,180 Registered Nurses in the United States with a *mean annual wage of $72,180*.

**What do nurses do?**

Nursing is a blend of science and technology with the art of caring and compassion. Every day on the job nurses use the science they learned in nursing school. And, when employed, they take continuing education courses on a regular basis to keep up with the latest in the medical and nursing sciences. Nurses work closely with doctors and other health care professionals, and serve as the advocates for patients and families. Ongoing advances in technology - which are helping people live longer, healthier lives - have made nursing even more rewarding to those who like developing their skills in this area.

**The job market**

Today, there is a significant nursing shortage, and statistics show that the need for nurses in years to come will only become greater. Here is why:

* Because advances in health care are helping people live longer, there are more elderly people who need care.
* The number of people who are sicker and in need of more skilled nurses is growing.
* More nurses are needed outside of the hospital setting.
* The current nursing workforce is aging. As more nurses retire (many are expected to retire over the next 10-15 years), more will be needed to replace them.

So, nurses today - particularly those with a bachelor of science degree in nursing (BSN) - are almost guaranteed jobs right out of college and can be assured of a secure career well into the future.

**Specialty nursing opportunities**

Many RNs pursue additional education to become:

* Clinical nurse specialists, who perform advanced work in specialized fields such as cancer or mental health;
* Certified nurse midwives, who help women through pregnancy, through childbirth, and help care for their newborns;
* Nurse anesthetists, who anesthetize patients in the operating room, emergency room, and elsewhere;
* Nurse researchers, who study ways to improve nursing methods, evaluate patterns of patient care, and more;
* Nurse practitioners, who perform many advanced medical functions that once only physicians were permitted to do; and,
* Psychiatric nurse practitioners, who perform functions that once only psychiatrists were permitted to do.

**Discuss these preparation tips with your high school counselor in order to develop an organized plan of study:**

* **Make sure you are on a college academic track.** Make sure you take the classes that you will need to be admitted to a college with a nursing program. You will need to take higher level math and science classes.
* **Learn study, organizational, and test taking skills now.** In order to successfully make it through nursing school you will need excellent academic habits while being self-disciplined. There will be few academic challenges in life as difficult as successfully making it through nursing school and passing your NCLEX-RN exam.
* **Study and learn as much as you can in your math and science classes.** College life can be a big transition for most students due to lifestyle changes, and the increased academic expectations. The more you learn in high school the better prepared you will be to make high grades in your college classes.
* **Maintain the highest possible GPA you can while taking the necessary preparatory classes.** Nursing program admission is a separate admission process. You are not granted a spot in a nursing program just because you attend their college. Nursing program admission is extremely competitive with an only a fraction of the applicants being admitted.
* **Volunteer.** Some hospitals offer a summer volunteer program for high school students. Apply and take advantage of this experience so that it may be included in your nursing school application.
* **Take a first aid and/or CPR class.** If your school does not offer these as part of your curriculum, find a community resource that does.
* **Become a CNA.**If you are 18 years old in high school, or have spare time in the summer, take a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) course to become certified. Being a licensed CNA can potentially help your nursing program admission. It offers a glimpse into the real world of healthcare.