THE straighterline™ GUIDE:
CAREERS IN NURSING
Congratulations!
You are thinking about earning your degree in nursing.

Going back to college is a big decision. It’s normal to feel a bit overwhelmed. You’re not alone. StraighterLine is here to help.

The Nursing Shortage Means Opportunity for You

There may have never been a better time to become a nurse. America’s baby boomers are aging. At the same time, Americans are living longer. The government projects that there will be more than 1.05 million new job openings for nurses by 2022 due to job growth and replacements. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing is predicting a shortage of trained nurses.

Want to know how to get started on your nursing degree?

Get your free personalized degree plan » View our network of partnership schools »
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PART ONE

Nursing: Do You Have What it Takes? Know Your Options.
Before we discuss your opportunities as a nurse, ask yourself:

**Is a career in nursing a good fit?**

The variety of entry points, educational requirement, and career opportunities available in nursing help make this field extremely attractive to adult learners, particularly those who want to work while earning a degree.

### The Three Entry Points of Nursing:

1. Nursing Aide, Orderly, & Attendant
2. Licensed Practical & Licensed Vocational Nurses (LPN & LVN)
3. Registered Nurse (RN)

You might consider starting your healthcare career as a nursing aide to see how you like working with patients. Once you’ve decided that nursing is the career for you, you can go back to college and become an LPN, an RN, or earn your BSN (Bachelor’s in Nursing).

Nursing offers a clear career path that aligns itself with having an easy-to-follow degree plan that uses online courses to flexibly reduce the cost of college. Online classes enable motivated health care providers to gain the additional knowledge and credentials they need while continuing to work.

Also, online colleges and universities have long been the distance learning option of choice for working nurses looking to earn additional credentials and education. In nursing, the opportunities to advance in your field are nearly unlimited. If you are ready, take your first steps today – and make sure a nursing career is right for you.

### How Do You Know If a Nursing Career Is Right for You?

For many who enter the nursing field, there is a sense that they didn’t choose nursing – nursing chose them. How do you know if you are one of the chosen?

To go into nursing, you will need a genuine desire to work directly with people, plus great communication and listening skills. Keep in mind, each entry point into nursing has its own particular set of educational requirements, skill sets, and job duties.

Next, we’ll spotlight which qualities and job duties are associated with each entry point in nursing. Assess where your career goals and strengths best align, and determine what level of education is required for the nursing roles that interest you most.

After going through this process, you will be able to see if you have what it takes to become a nurse – and if you’re ready to take the next steps towards earning your college degree in nursing.
Compassion.
Provide care for the sick, injured, and elderly. A caring attitude is essential.

Patience.
The routine tasks of cleaning, feeding, and bathing patients or residents can be stressful. You must be patient to provide quality care.

Speaking & Listening skills.
You must be able to communicate effectively to understand and address patients’ concerns. You also need to communicate patients’ statuses to other healthcare workers.

Typical Duties
Nursing aides and attendants provide basic care and help with individuals’ living activities, and generally do the following tasks:

• Clean and bathe
• Help patients use the toilet and dress
• Turn, reposition, and transfer patients between beds and wheelchairs
• Listen to and record patients’ health concerns and report that information to nurses
• Measure patients’ vital signs, such as blood pressure and temperature
• Serve meals and help patients eat

Orderlies may do some of the same tasks as nursing aides and attendants, although they do not usually provide healthcare services. They typically do the following:

• Transport patients, such as taking a hospital patient to an operating room
• Clean equipment and facilities

Education Required
In order to become a nursing aide or attendant, you will need a postsecondary certificate, earned either by taking classes online or in an on-campus setting, as well as passing your state’s competency exam. Orderlies, in general, need at least a high school diploma.

Get your free personalized nursing degree plan
Compassion.
An empathetic and caring attitude is necessary. Detail oriented. LPNs and LVNs need to be responsible and detail-oriented because they must make sure that patients get the correct treatment at the right time.

Interpersonal skills.
As an LPN or LVN, you will be working with people; an ability to do this effectively is essential.

Patience.
Dealing with sick and injured people is often stressful. LPNs and LVNs should be patient so they can cope with stress that can come from providing healthcare to these patients.

Communication skills.
You need to be able to communicate effectively – both listening and speaking. You will need to be able to listen to a patient and provide information to other nurses, such RNs and doctors.

Stamina.
LPNs and LVNs will need to be comfortable performing physical tasks, such as bending over patients for a long time.

Typical Duties
Licensed Practical andLicensed Vocational Nurses typically:
• Monitor patients’ health – for example, by checking their blood pressure
• Administer basic nursing care, including changing bandages and inserting catheters
• Help patients with bathing or dressing
• Discuss health care with patients and listen to their concerns
• Report patients’ status to registered nurses and doctors
• Keep records on patients’ health

Keep in mind, duties can vary depending on your work setting, for example, you may teach family members how to care for a relative; help to deliver, care for, and feed infants; collect samples for testing and do routine laboratory tests; or feed patients who need help eating.

In some states, LPNs with proper training can give medication or start intravenous (IV) drips, while in other states they cannot. State regulations govern the extent to which LPNs and LVNs must be directly supervised. In some states, an LPN may provide certain forms of care only with instructions from a registered nurse.

Education Required
LPNs & LVNs must complete an accredited program, typically a combination of classes (either online college courses or on-campus), such as anatomy & physiology, pharmacology, and nursing as well as supervised clinical experience. An LPN or LVN must also pass the National Council License Examination (NCLEX-PN) to obtain their license to work in all states.
**Spotlight: RN (Registered Nurse)**

**Critical-thinking skills.**
Ability to assess changes in the health of patients, including when to take corrective action and when to make referrals.

**Compassion.**
It’s valuable for a nurse to be caring and sympathetic, a trait that is critical when treating patients.

**Detail oriented.**
RNs must make sure that patients get the correct treatments and medicines at the right time.

**Emotionally stable.**
RNs will be constantly exposed to a variety of stresses, and must possess the emotional strength and stability to cope with human suffering and medical emergencies.

**Organizational skills.**
Nurses often work with multiple patients with various health needs, and organizational skills are critical to ensure that each patient is given proper care.

**Patience.**
RNs will be expected to provide quality care under stressful or hectic circumstances.

**Communication Skills.**
RNs must be able to talk and listen effectively with patients and their families to correctly assess health conditions. Nurses need to clearly explain how to take medication or give other instructions.

RNs also must be able to work in teams with other health professionals, including doctors and administrators, and to communicate patients’ needs.

**Typical Duties**
Registered Nurses typically:
- Record patients’ medical histories and symptoms
- Give patients medicines and treatments
- Set up plans for patients’ care or contribute to existing plans
- Observe patients and record observations
- Consult with doctors and other healthcare professionals
- Operate and monitor medical equipment
- Help perform diagnostic tests and analyze results
- Teach patients and their families how to manage their illnesses or injuries
- Explain what to do at home after treatment
Additionally, some registered nurses oversee licensed practical nurses, nursing aides, and home care aides. Some RNs go on to become hospital administrators and fill other management positions.

**Education Required**

To become a registered nurse, you can take one of three education paths: a Bachelor’s of Science degree in Nursing (BSN), an Associate degree in Nursing (ADN), or a diploma from an approved nursing program. All three will require you to take a variety of science courses.

Nursing prerequisites can be affordably completed online and your nursing degree can be earned through online colleges and universities or on-campus programs. Licensing is also required.

BSN programs typically take four years to complete; ADN and diploma programs usually take two to three years to complete.

All programs also include supervised clinical experience in hospital departments such as pediatrics, psychiatry, maternity, and surgery. A number of programs include clinical experience in extended and long-term care facilities, public health departments, home health agencies, or ambulatory (walk-in) clinics.

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**Your Nursing Checklist**

As you contemplate whether or not a career in nursing is right for you, run this quick checklist:

- Do you have good communications skills? Both speaking and listening?
- Are you emotionally stable and strong?
- Are you empathetic?
- Are you patient?
- Are you able to work well with a variety of people?
- Do you pay attention to detail?
- Do you have good physical endurance?
- Are you good in stressful situations?

*If you answer yes to most of these questions, there’s a good chance that nursing is an excellent fit – and that you have what it takes to become a nurse.*
PART TWO

What Do Nursing Jobs Pay?
How much can you expect to earn after you earn a degree in nursing? The answer to that question depends on many factors, including...

- **The degree you earn**: Candidates with bachelor’s degrees generally command higher salaries than do candidates with associate degrees – at least during their early working years.

- **Your specialty and/or certifications**: If you’ve been trained for a high-demand specialty like psychiatric nursing, for example, you can expect to command a larger paycheck. Additionally, certifications that you earn, such as a certificate in advanced diabetes management, can enhance your earning potential. And remember, you can study and train for additional certification credentials while you are working as a nurse.

- **Your geographical area**: According to data collected by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013), registered nurse compensation is highest in: California (annual mean salary of $96,980); Hawaii ($85,380); Massachusetts ($83,720); Alaska ($83,640); and Oregon ($80,440).

### Nursing Salaries by Specialty

Salary.com has put together a comprehensive list of nursing specialties and the average salaries that they pay. Here are median salaries listed on the site for some of the nursing specialties that earn the most...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty</th>
<th>Median Salary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certified Nurse Anesthetist</td>
<td>$165,197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neonatal Nurse Practitioner</td>
<td>$107,267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Room Nurse Practitioner</td>
<td>$100,876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse Practitioners</td>
<td>$96,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charge Nurse</td>
<td>$75,596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Care Clinical Nurse Specialist</td>
<td>$68,050</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you consider training to become a nurse, it is wise to think about more than how much you can earn annually. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, demand for Registered Nurses will grow faster than other occupations through year 2022. So when you train to become a nurse, you can enjoy the kind of job security that few other professions offer today.

### Nursing Salaries by Certification

How much can you add to your earning potential by becoming a Registered Nurse (RN), a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN), or by adding another certificate to your professional credentials? Here is some information you should know...

- **Registered Nurses (RNs)** must earn certain educational credentials, such as a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree. Additionally, the RN certification is awarded after passing a national licensing exam, the NCLEX-RN. RNs work in many different settings, including intensive care units, hospitals of all kinds, and emergency rooms. Earnings vary, but here are two examples: According to Salary.com, an RN who works as a staff nurse in a long term care facility can expect to earn a median annual salary of $62,655; an RN who works in an intensive care unit can expect to earn $68,946.

- **Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) and Licensed Vocational Nurses (LVNs)** do not need to earn college degrees in order to be certified. LPNs are awarded certificates after passing the National Council Licensure Exam for Practical Nurses, NCLEX-PN.

- **Licensed Vocational Nurses** often train to obtain that credential at community colleges, vocational or training schools, yet credentials and licensing requirements can vary by state. Be sure to consult your state’s department of health or other appropriate agencies to determine what tests the state requires for licensure or certification. Salaries vary widely, because both LPNs and LVNs work in many kinds of facilities - from hospitals to testing and emergency care facilities. According to Salary.com, the median salary for all LPNs is $43,351.
PART THREE

How to Get Started in Nursing.
You’ll quickly discover you have many flexible, and low-cost options to earn your nursing degree. As an adult, having flexible and budget-friendly distance learning options, like those offered online, can make all the difference between wanting to fit a nursing education into your life and actually having the flexibility to do so.

**Not only are some of the most flexible and respected nursing programs in the country offered online, they are also one of the best ways to earn or upgrade your nursing credentials.**

- If you want to see if a nursing degree program is a good fit – you can enroll in low-cost [nursing courses online](https://www.straighterline.com/courses-nursing). Doing so will help you avoid being stuck paying thousands of dollars in tuition and fees should you decide that nursing isn’t the best fit after all.

- If you want to save significantly on your nursing degree, you can take your required general education courses online. For $1,299, you can enroll in [StraighterLine’s Full Year of College](https://www.straighterline.com) program, and take up to ten 3- and 4-credit general education courses required for your nursing degree, including science, labs, and math.

- If you are on a waiting list to enter nursing school, you can complete your general education courses while you wait. If you plan on attending a school in the StraighterLine College Savings Network, all approved StraighterLine courses are [guaranteed to transfer](https://www.straighterline.com/transfer).

- If your current employer requires you to upgrade your current nursing credentials to a BSN, online education provides you with ability to take classes anytime, anywhere. If you plan on continuing to work while earning your degree, as most adult learners do, the flexibility of online learning can’t be beat.

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**Degree Pathways to Nursing**

1. **Earn College Credit Prior to Enrolling in Nursing School**

Nursing prerequisites, such as general education science and math courses, can be affordably completed online. Plus, if you earn college credit prior to enrolling in your nursing degree program, you’ll find yourself on the fast track to earning your degree. Nursing has a very clear set of educational requirements; a [degree plan](https://www.straighterline.com/degree-plans) can help you efficiently decide which courses to complete online prior to enrollment in your degree program.

You can complete the general education courses you need to earn your nursing degree with StraighterLine’s low-cost online courses. Plus, you are guaranteed to receive full course credit for approved classes taken with StraighterLine when you enroll at one of StraighterLine’s partner colleges – the majority of which offer degrees in nursing, no wait list for enrollment, and the ability to complete your degree 100% online.
2. **Licensed Practical Nurse or Licensed Vocational Nurse (LPN/LVN)**

You can earn your LPN or LVN during yearlong programs typically offered through technical schools, community colleges, or online. These programs are occasionally found in high schools or hospitals as well. As you earn your LPN or LVN, you will most likely combine hands-on supervised clinical experience with taking classes in subjects such as nursing, biology, and pharmacology.

Once you receive your certificate, you are eligible to take the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN). You must pass the exam to get a license to work as an LPN/LVN.

3. **Nursing Diploma (Hospital Earned)**

You can earn a Nursing Diploma by enrolling in a hospital nursing program. Generally, these programs take 2 years to complete and offer you the ability to observe and practice patient care in a variety of environments. Typically, hospitals partner with community colleges or online colleges to provide students with an opportunity to earn an associate degree in addition to a nursing diploma.

4. **Associate in Nursing (ASN/ADN)**

An Associate in Nursing trains and prepares nurses to provide direct patient care in settings such as hospitals or rehabilitation centers. Earning an ASN/ADN, whether through an online college or on campus, is an excellent first step into nursing. An ASS/ADN provides an opportunity for you to start working as a nurse quickly and gain experience with direct patient care. Many students use their ASN/ADN as a stepping-stone towards earning their BSN or even a Master of Science in Nursing later on.

Earning an ASN/ADN allows you to take the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN). Once you pass the NCLEX-RN test, you are considered a Registered Nurse (RN).

5. **Bachelor’s of Science in Nursing (BS/BSN)**

A BS/BSN is a 4-year degree that can be earned 100% online or on-campus. BS/BSN programs usually require more training in the physical and social sciences, advanced communication skills, leadership ability, and more critical thinking skills than an associate degree. A Registered Nurse who holds a bachelor’s degree in nursing generally has a greater opportunity for advancement compared to other types of RNs.

Many nursing positions that previously did not require a BSN now do. Plus, if you are interested in using your nursing credentials to obtain an administrative, research, consulting, or teaching position – earning your Bachelor of Science in Nursing is the way to go.

When you earn your BS/BSN, you are able to take the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN). Passing this test allows you to practice as a Registered Nurse (RN).

6. **Accelerated BSN or Nursing As a Second Career**

If you are considering switching your career into nursing, but have already earned your degree in another field, you have an option other students don’t. You can enroll in an accelerated nursing program that allows you to move through your nursing degree without repeating course work you’ve already taken. By doing so, an Accelerated BSN program allows you to earn your nursing degree faster. Building on course work you’ve already completed (including prerequisites completed through online course providers), you can earn your BSN in a shorter amount of time than it would take if you were starting from scratch.

You can earn an accelerated BSN through online colleges and universities as well as through on-campus programs.

[View our network of partnership schools](#)
**Make Connections Now**

As you research your many nursing degree program, it’s smart to start making connections. The more familiar you are with medical terminology, degree paths, career options, and the issues facing the nurses today, the better prepared you will be to find success. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Volunteer:** Whether at the hospital nearest you or a doctor’s office, you can get a sense of the reality of nursing by volunteering.
- **Participate in a Nursing Organization:** You can stay a step ahead of what’s going on in the nursing field by following the latest trends on the [American Association of Colleges of Nursing](http://www.aacn.nche.edu) website, or by subscribing to newsletters and publications of the various organizations which serve nurses:
  - American Nurses Association
  - Association of Women's Health
  - National Student Nurses’ Association

**When It’s Right, It’s Right**

Whether you are ready to take your first college course, or returning to school for advanced credentials, you can fit college into your already-busy life. For adult students, online education has opened the door to flexible and affordable pathways to a nursing degree. After all, when it’s right, it’s right. And the only way you will know for sure if nursing is right for you is to take that first class.

**Required StraighterLine courses you’ll need to pursue your nursing degree:**

**GENERAL CHEMISTRY I**

- 3 credits

**ANATOMY & PHYSIOLOGY I**

- 1-3 credits

**ANATOMY & PHYSIOLOGY II**

- 1-3 credits

**Here are the StraighterLine courses you’ll probably need to pursue your nursing degree:**

**MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY**

- 3 credits

**PHARMACOLOGY I**

- 3 credits

**PHARMACOLOGY II**

- 3 credits

**INTRODUCTION TO NUTRITION**

- 3 credits

**INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOLOGY**

- 3 credits
PART FOUR

Where are Nursing Jobs? How Do I Get One?
Best Locations for Nursing Jobs

California currently leads the U.S. as the best state to find nursing job, by far. Texas is next, followed by New York and Florida. Of these states, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, California nurses make the most income.

Overall, an average registered nurse is paid $33.13 per hour but nursing salaries will vary based on your specialty or where you live.

RNs Average Hourly Wage, Sample Comparison by State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Average Hourly Wage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>$46.62/hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>$32.62/hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>$36.29/hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>$29.84/hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>$31.74/hour</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

California is the only state that requires a clinical for the BSN. Florida will continue to have tremendous growth for nursing, particularly in elder care. Currently, about 18.2% of Florida’s population is age 65 and older. By 2020, more than 20% of Floridians are expected to be over age 65, and by 2030, more than 25% will be over 65.

Best way to find a job? Network

There are many ways to network – and all are beneficial. Using social media, like LinkedIn, can help you make the most of your connections. Take the time before you start looking for a job to identify your important contacts and resources, secure appropriate recommendations, and get your resume ready to go. Use all the resources available to you, including your school’s career services.
What is StraighterLine?

Decisions Made Easier.
We’ll evaluate your prior credits, help you choose a school and build a degree plan that maximizes your savings, better utilizes your time and achieves your goals.

A Better Experience.
Our sole focus is on general education courses and delivering the best possible student experience. Every StraighterLine course is engineered to increase your success, count for credit towards your degree, and to save you money.

Real Savings.
Every course at StraighterLine saves you money on your degree at a school in our network of accredited colleges. We guarantee it. Save even more by taking multiple courses from StraighterLine, qualify for special tuition discounts and save up to 60% on the total cost of your degree.

How It Works

1. Choose Your Courses
   Every course is engineered to increase your success, count for credit towards your degree, and to save you money.

2. Earn College Credit
   Complete your StraighterLine courses and we guarantee that they will transfer to nearly 100 accredited colleges.

3. Transfer & Get Your Degree
   Graduate with the degree you want, from the school you want for a fraction of the price.

Choose Your Courses  View Colleges  Chat with an Advisor
If you're going back to college to get your nursing degree, this checklist makes it easy for you to find the nursing program that is right for you and to save money on your degree.

**Explore**
- Determine if going back to college as a nurse is worth it, including weighing the benefits and costs, comparing degree program tuition costs, and evaluating low-cost online courses.
- Develop clear career goals and assess different nursing specialties, including education requirements and average wages.
- Explore degree pathways to nursing and consider taking self-paced online classes prior to enrolling in a degree program to save money and increase your chance of success.

**Compare**
- Compare nursing career opportunities, including new job growth projections and openings.
- Assess any academic gaps and get your general education courses out of the way.
- Evaluate your nursing degree options and determine which degree program is right for you, including schedule flexibility, student loan debt, graduation rates, credit transfer, career placement, time to degree, and online education.

**Plan**
- Get a nursing degree plan to determine which general education courses and prerequisites you can complete prior to enrolling.
- Speak with an enrollment counselor to discuss tuition rates, financial aid, scholarships, and the credit transfer process.
- Pay less for your degree by completing your eligible general education courses online, getting a scholarship, and maximizing credit transfer.
- Look at your current income and apply for financial aid, if necessary, including scholarships.
- Submit college admission application(s).

**Enroll & Succeed**
- Speak with an academic advisor in your nursing program to determine which classes you need and when to sign up.
- Review your technology needs and trouble shoot any issues prior to starting class.
- Develop a class schedule, including creating a calendar that maps out the time necessary for studying, for work, for errands, and your family.
- Brush up on your time management skills.
- Celebrate your successes, big and small.
Sources

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