

How to become a doctor

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No matter who you are, where you live or what your background is, anyone who has the ability, personal attributes and motivation can apply to study medicine.

For many, the decision to become a doctor is a lifelong dream, with the simple desire to help people.

For others it's a life changing encounter or experience that provides the inspiration and motivation to pursue medicine as a career.

What's your inspiration for becoming a doctor?

Qualities of a doctor

Motivation to study medicine, a genuine interest in the medical profession

Conscientiousness

Insight into your own strengths and weaknesses

Insight into your own health

The ability to reflect on your own work

Effective communication

Personal organisation

Teamwork

Academic ability

Ability to treat people with respect

Problem solving

Resilience

Dealing with uncertainty

Empathy, the ability to care for others

Manage risk and deal effectively with problems

Honesty

Ability to take responsibility for your own actions

The ability to deal with difficult situations

Life as a doctor

Working in contemporary medicine is a challenging, exciting and dynamic career path.

From being a GP based in the community, to a surgeon working in a hospital, a geneticist in a lab to a lecturer teaching students, or working in the armed forces or police force, there are over 60 specialties in medicine on offer.

Whatever specialty you choose, lifelong learning is a key part of being a doctor and doesn't stop once you finish medical school.

Are you prepared for a lifetime of learning?

Career path for doctors



Medical degree – 4/5/6 years

- Undergraduate course studied at university.
- Involves basic medical sciences, core learning and practical clinical tasks.
- Initial exposure to different specialties.
- Depending on the course type, you will be assessed in many ways including exams, essays, and presenting to groups.



Foundation Training – 2 years Foundation Year 1 (F1) – 1 year

- Provisional registration gained from the General Medical Council (GMC).
- Foundation years help newly qualified graduate to build on knowledge and skills gained at medical school.
- After successfully completing F1 year, you receive full registration with the GMC.



Foundation Year 2 (F2) – 1 year

- Continue general training, exposure to a range of different work environments.
- Rotations in different medical specialties, to help you find out what suits you and which area of medicine you want to specialise in.
- At the end of foundation training, you must demonstrate a high level of skill and competency in managing acutely ill patients, team work and communication.



Core Medical Training or Acute Care Common Stem – CT1/2 or ST1/2 – 2 years

- These two years help to build on the skills gained in foundation years.
- At this stage you can choose your specialty, whether it be primary care as a GP or secondary care, which could be working in a hospital.
- Must complete the MRCP (UK) exam, undertake continual workplace assessments, to ensure you are learning and getting feedback on your work from patients and colleagues.



Specialty training (ST3-ST8) – Between 4-6 years

General practice training (GP trainee) – 3 years

- The specialty you choose will determine how long your training will be at this stage, as each specialty differs in length.
- This period of your career involves in depth learning and practise in advanced areas and working more autonomously, with continued supervision from senior doctors.
- You must complete a Specialty Certificate Examination (SCE) and workplace assessments continue throughout.
- Once specialty training is complete, you receive a Certificate of Completion of training (CCT) and gain entry to either the GMC specialist register or GP register.
- You can now work as and apply for more senior positions, such as consultant and GP principal roles.



Continuing professional development (CPD)

- To stay registered with the GMC, all doctors are expected to demonstrate their fitness to practise through gaining CPD points every year.
- The purpose of CPD is to help improve the safety and quality of care provided for patients and the public.
- Gaining CPD points is completed through undertaking online courses and modules, workshops, seminars and various other formal and informal learning activities.

Applying to medical school

Medicine is a popular career choice and competition for places at medical school is extremely high.

Medicine	Higher education sector average
11.2	5.5

Competition ratio for medicine and the higher education sector average; number of applications per place (UCAS web, 2013)

Make sure you're prepared by doing your research on the subjects you need to study and the grades you need to be eligible to apply.

See our comprehensive guide on applying to medical school, whether you are a school leaver, recent grad or mature aged student: [bma.org.uk/applyingtomedschool](https://www.bma.org.uk/applyingtomedschool)

There are 35 medical schools located across the UK. All of them vary in terms of their application requirements, as well as activities, clubs and social life that makes up university life as a medical student.

Make sure you do your research on which medical school will suit you.

See our interactive map of UK medical schools at: [bma.org.uk/medschoolmap](https://www.bma.org.uk/medschoolmap)

Applying to medical school – school leavers

All UK medical schools accept applications that demonstrate:

- a combination of GCSEs, AS levels and A levels
- the majority will require good grades in science subjects, as these form the foundation of the medical curriculum
- good GCSE passes in english and mathematics.

Medical schools generally seek good grades in:

- chemistry at A level and often A level biology
- one other science subject is often required, for example, physics, physical science or mathematics
- a good A level grade in an arts subject, such as history or a modern language, will usually be accepted as a third A level.

Use the BMJ med school selector to find out which medical schools you could apply to

Applying to medical school – graduates, mature aged and foundation students

Not everyone's route to medical school is the same.

While many medical students enter straight from school, there are a variety of ways you can enter medicine and become a doctor.

If you already have another degree, are a mature aged student or someone who has no science background or limited qualifications, there are a number of routes into medical school that you can access.

Many universities offer graduate entry programmes to medicine and foundation or pre-clinical medicine courses, that give students the chance to enter medical school through an alternative route.

Application process

Entry requirements vary between medical schools, so it's important to check with the individual schools you are thinking of applying to, for the most up to date information.

Read our in depth guide and get some useful tips for getting your medical school application ready.

[bma.org.uk/applicationprocess](https://www.bma.org.uk/applicationprocess)

Top tips

- Don't rush! Find out the deadlines, apply as early as possible and give yourself plenty of time to get your application ready.
- Check the competition ratios of medical schools. If you are worried about your chances, consider newer medical schools, as they often have less competition for each place.
- When asked in your interview why you want to study medicine, be honest. You will stand out much more for being genuine, even if it sounds cliched, than if you try to come up with a fancy reason in an attempt to stand out.

More information

For more inspiration on becoming a doctor, or to get help with your application, take a look at these handy resources:

- Future doctors on Connecting doctors: Hear from current med students about the issues that matter to them on our online community space
- The Student Room: Forums, information and insight for students, by students.
- Student BMJ: Topical news articles, personal stories and more. Free to register.
- NHS Careers: The information service for careers in the NHS in England.

[bma.org.uk/howtobecomeadoctor](https://www.bma.org.uk/howtobecomeadoctor)

What is the BMA?

The British Medical Association (BMA) is the trade union and professional body for doctors in the UK. Our vision is a profession of valued doctors delivering the highest quality health services and we are here to support and represent doctors and medical students.

[bma.org.uk](https://www.bma.org.uk)