

Choice Overload: Navigating the High Schooler's Roadmap to Nursing School

Still in high school? Dreaming of becoming a nurse? Overwhelmed by the choices? Let's discuss the various options available today.

Motivations, Strengths, and Weaknesses

First, nurses assess before they plan. Likewise, major life decisions deserve similar reflection. Assess your motivations. Sometimes, a child's starry eyes form their [dream](#), which evolves into a fantasy shaped by the imagination, social media, popular shows, and "hero" nurses we know.

Idealism

New grad nurses quickly discover that heavy patient loads, deep responsibilities, a lack of gratitude, and organizational demands crush their idealized view of nursing. Not to mention, nurses remain professional. When a patient, family member, provider, or another nurse demonstrates unkindness, organizations expect the nurse to stay grounded and act appropriately. To succeed, the nurse must choose to abandon the fantasy of warm, fulfilling work in favor of self-sacrifice in the trenches. [Failure to transition](#) can create long-term issues with job performance and satisfaction, leading to stress, burnout, and ultimately leaving the field.

Reality

Discouraged? Plenty of wonderful professions fulfil those desires felt in childhood. Still want to be a nurse? We replace our desire to demonstrate nurturing, kindness, and helpfulness with professional competence and warmth, not basing our fulfillment on the ups and downs of the day's experiences. We anticipate challenges in a demanding profession. Our properly adjusted attitudes and expectations lead to a fulfilling career in an honorable profession.

Practical Steps Toward Nursing

Shadow or volunteer before choosing your school, preferably in multiple settings. Then, invest in a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program. CNAs gain real-life, hands-on experience that builds confidence in their career choice, offers useful tidbits for nursing school, and helps them land their first nursing job. A word of caution: many nursing programs request that students minimize work hours to focus on their rigorous courses.

What Nursing Role Fits You Best?

What are your goals? Personality? Introvert or extrovert, nurturing or science-based? A leader or follower? General practice nurses require a little of all. However, certain specialties cater to

different personalities. Unfortunately, those who desire to branch out in nursing often must endure a season of difficulty in a skilled or medical-surgical unit, as both usually serve as a funnel for most specialties.

Nursing students and new nurses learn and survive, taking things a day at a time. At the same time, early strategic planning eases the way. Consider how you think and relate to others, and then reflect on this general guide, keeping in mind that all experience their own forms of burnout with poor support or self-care:

- **High emotional intelligence and supportive:** Hospice, oncology, and labor and delivery provide a personal touch in joy and heartbreak.
- **Scientific, dynamic, independent, and less relational:** Intensive care unit, possibly progressing to nurse anesthetist, acute care nurse practitioner, or flight nurse
- **Intelligent, street-smart, adaptable, capable, and efficient:** Emergency department
- **Small teams, specific roles, and structure:** Operating room
- **Organization, leading, systems:** Management
- **Analysis and a preference for the medical side:** Nurse practitioner

Also, patient contact frequently decreases with higher levels of education:

- **CNA:** Direct patient contact with minimal documentation
- **Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN):** Direct patient contact for treatment and medications, but a large portion of time charting
- **Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) and Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) prepared nurses:** Assessments, medication administration, treatments, and preparing plans and documenting
- **Master's or Doctorate:** Depends on the focus, often less direct patient care and more planning, teaching, or researching

Educational Pathway to Nursing

Most nursing students choose to pursue a BSN. Navigating that path depends on both the preference for hands-on experience and the need to work. Nursing uniquely offers a stair-step approach to education, making continual improvement possible.

LPN coursework allows a short training period (less than 18 months) to land that first job. The LPN license provides valuable experience, nursing opportunities, and a stable income. LPNs perform most of the functions of a registered nurse (RN) without the responsibilities of full assessments and care planning.

ADN- and BSN-prepared nurses may sit for the National Council of State Boards of Nursing's National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN) after two years of nursing school. The ADN allows the nurse to test for their RN at two years, then work and gain experience. They may pursue any number of RN-to-BSN options at their convenience.

As a preferred degree for most major hospital systems, the BSN offers more opportunities in the job market. Frequently, schools that provide only BSN coursework emphasize book knowledge and evidence-based practice. They provide lab and clinical experiences; however, nurses tend to leave these programs with less confidence in the practical aspects of nursing and often require additional on-the-job training to develop basic skills. Graduate studies require the completion of the BSN.

Efficiency with Coursework

Nurses value efficiency. Nursing programs often require non-nursing coursework before enrollment. Many high schools offer programs or advanced classes that allow students to earn college credit. Nursing schools publish prerequisites in their application materials or nursing program details. Try choosing courses that satisfy both your high school graduation requirements and the prerequisites for your top three school choices. Although mind-numbing, this investment will pay dividends later. Also, when reviewing prerequisites, consider the nursing program and select any non-core classes. This attention to detail provides freedom to focus on the incredible amount of memorization required during nursing school.

What Makes a Great Nursing School?

While daunting, addressing the issues above provides a foundation and path to prepare you. The practical side of [choosing](#) a school encompasses the program quality and students' preferences:

- **Admissions requirements:** Do you qualify for the program?
- **NCLEX-RN pass rates:** The higher, the better
- **Lab experience:** Provides confidence with hands-on assessments and skills
- **Simulation:** Invaluable for critical thinking under stress.
- **Clinical experience:** Consider quantity, quality, and any need for you to coordinate.
- **Job placement:** Many schools don't help with landing a role, but nursing students often network during clinicals.
- **Personal fit:** Do the program duration and cohort size meet your needs?
- **Cost:** Factor in tuition, housing, and financial aid.
- **Location:** Choose based on your desires, budget, and need for support and online options (more for ADN to BSN programs).

Blaze the Trail to Your Nursing Career

With clear expectations, an understanding of the options, and a path forward, go forth and chase your dream to pursue this professional, rewarding career in the way that matches your personality and interests. Go for it, and don't look back!

References

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