



Deciding on Medicine

So, you're thinking of becoming a doctor?

You've come to the right place! The Medic Portal has created a free step-by-step guide to help you finalise deciding on medicine and equip you with everything you need to get into medical school.

Studying medicine usually involves 5 years of study at university, followed by more training years at the start of your career. So it's important to make sure that medicine is right for you.

This page provides the headline information for those of you deciding on medicine, before offering a step-by-step guide on what you need to do. Don't forget to use all the subpages to make the most of the section.

Deciding on Medicine: What's Being a Doctor Like?

Being a doctor is a uniquely rewarding career. It is also extremely challenging.

Unlike other courses you might apply to, medicine ties you directly into a specific career path. In the UK, it also binds you to a particular employer: the [National Health Service \(NHS\)](#).

If you're deciding on medicine, it's very important that you understand the realities of being a doctor as well as you can before committing to the pathway. This includes being clued-up on the NHS.

Medicine binds scientific challenge with human interaction. It also offers a genuine chance to make a difference to peoples' lives.

On the other hand, being a doctor is highly stressful. There are times when you won't be able to help and will be breaking bad news — often after long hours and working nights.

The best way to start getting an insight into whether medicine is right for you is to read our case studies, get some [medical work experience](#) and follow our [blogs](#) from medical applicants and students.

Deciding on Medicine: What Makes A Good Doctor?

There are certain key qualities that make a good medical student and, ultimately, a good doctor.

If you're deciding on medicine, it helps if you possess the following traits:

- Academic excellence
- Strong scientific ability
- Commitment and tenacity
- Organisational skills
- People skills, like empathy
- Communication skills
- Ability to work in a team
- Leadership potential
- Stress management
- Desire to learn and teach

How Can I Decide on Medicine?

Deciding on medicine is a significant decision – so it's crucial you do your research! We spoke to Charlene, former careers advisor at [Health Education England](#), about how to make the best decision for you.

1. Produce a list of all available options

If you're on this page, it's very likely you're considering a career in healthcare – whether that's becoming a doctor, dentist or nurse – or allied health role, such as a physiotherapist or paramedic.

If you like science, might you be interested in a career involving research, diagnostics or developing and recommending treatment options?

If you're interested in working in supporting people in communities could a career in charity work or local government be for you? The more ideas you can come up with, the better.

Often just seeing these on paper can draw you more towards or rule out certain areas. This can also tell you something about which are the most important ones you want to research in more detail.

2. Draw a timeline

Jot down how you've approached previous decisions in relation to study or even getting involved in a hobby or group. How have you approached these? What influenced you? What contributed to them being good (or less good) decisions? Would you do anything different

with hindsight? This can give you important insights about how to approach decisions ahead of you.

3. Think about yourself

- What do you like doing? How do you like to spend your time? What don't you like and why? Think about what is going to get the best out of you and give you the most satisfaction.
- What are you good at? For example, do you have fantastic organisational, time management and team working skills needed for medicine? Do you have strong scientific ability and the manual dexterity skills needed for dentistry?
- What feedback have you had from others about your skills, such as from teachers, friends, family – what do they say about you? Giving some detailed thought into your skills can provide you with really important evidence about yourself to inform your future decision.
- Think about what matters to you most. Having responsibility? Variety? People contact? Having good work-life balance? Thinking about things like this can provide you with worthwhile insights into how possible options 'fit' with your values.
- Imagine a typical day doing each role. Does the typical day of a doctor sound like you? Do you want to be in that role?

4. Research your options

- Examine the entry requirements and the training required for your different options – whether that's for [medicine](#), [dentistry](#), [nursing and allied health](#) or other [health professions](#) or [wider career options](#) that interest you. Importantly, don't rely solely on this to reach your decision or overload yourself with too much information!
- Attend career events, fairs and open days and go prepared with questions you want answered
- Talk to trusted friends and family members whose opinions you value – what do they think?
- Arrange some work experience and shadowing opportunities – sometimes easier said than done – but important in terms of wider understanding about potential future roles. Use every opportunity you can to understand the nature of what's involved.

5. Document your progress

If you're like most people, it's common to have loads of information and thoughts swimming about in your head, especially when facing an important decision. So putting things down on paper can be a good first step.

6. Make a clear action plan

While it may be easy to put things off, challenge yourself to come up with some specific actions that will help you progress your thoughts.

- Organise all the information on various health careers you need that can help you decide
- Prioritise what you need to do and put dates on when you will want these things done by. Setting regular reminders on your phone or calendar can be a good strategy to keep you on track. This is a great way to monitor your progress too!
- Tell people about your actions and tell them how they can provide encouragement and support (eg this could be completely unrelated to the decision itself such as having some valuable downtime, or could simply be *'how you getting on with...?'*)
- Regularly review and amend your actions as you go along as you progress your thinking

Taking a structured approach and knowing that you did everything you possibly could can be really worth the time invested into making a well informed decision – good luck!

Medical Degree UK: What Is The Medical School Application Process?

Applying to study medicine in the UK is a long and challenging process. But The Medic Portal is here to help you through each and every step after deciding on medicine. In summary, these are:

1. Deciding on Medicine — making sure being a doctor is right for you
2. [Doing Work Experience](#) — finding out what it's like and strengthening your application
3. [Choosing a Medical School](#) — narrowing down from 33 to your top four
4. [Completing UCAS](#) — applying to four UK medical schools through UCAS
5. [Writing a Personal Statement](#) — writing a great personal statement for your UCAS form
6. [Doing UKCAT](#) — getting a top mark in this key entrance exam for most medical schools
7. [Doing BMAT](#) — taking this second exam if you are applying to certain universities
8. [Passing the Interview](#) — performing well at medical school interviews
9. Starting at medical school!

Medical Degree UK: What Is The Medical Training Pathway?

Before deciding on medicine, it is important that you understand what medical school is going to be like. However, medicine courses in the UK can be quite different.

In order to learn more about what to expect, you should read-up on the different course structures: [traditional courses](#), [integrated courses](#) and [problem-based learning](#).

Can I Study Medicine Abroad?

Studying medicine abroad is an increasingly popular option. There are some great options, it is cheaper and it can provide an opportunity for those who don't get an offer in the UK. Read more about international options [here](#).

Are There Other Options In Healthcare?

If you're deciding on medicine and working in healthcare really appeals to you but you're not sure about becoming a doctor, you might be well-suited to dentistry and allied health professions..

What happens after medical school?

After you finish medical school, it's time to begin your career as a junior doctor. Foundation training is the first step along the postgraduate training pathway, and will last for two years.