

Cook

Run a station in a working kitchen. Hired on attitude, trained on the line, paid from day one.

TYPICAL PAY

\$37,390

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$29k to \$48k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 2 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

**Restaurants, hotels, cafeterias,
catering kitchens**

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma or the GED (General Educational Development) test** Grade 12
Useful, and required by some larger employers, but plenty of kitchens do not ask.
- 2 Get a food handler card** A couple of hours
Cheap and online. Many counties require it before your first shift.
- 3 Start in prep or on dish** 3 to 12 months
Almost everyone starts here. Show up on time, work clean, and you move onto the line in months.
- 4 Learn every station** 1 to 3 years
Grill, saute, fry, garde manger, pastry. A cook who can run any station is the one who gets kept and paid.
- 5 Lead cook or sous chef** 3 to 6 years in
Ordering, prep lists, scheduling and running service when the chef is off.

Pros and cons

- + You can start this week with no qualifications and no debt
- + A skill that feeds you and works in every town in the country
- + Fast promotion, because kitchens are always short staffed
- Nights, weekends and holidays, which costs you a normal social life
- Pay is low for the hours and the pressure
- Burns, cuts, heat and standing on concrete for ten hours

Good to know

It is one of the fastest hiring jobs in the country

The federal career profile flags restaurant cook as a bright outlook with rapid growth and large numbers of openings. Turnover is part of that: kitchens are constantly replacing people, which is bad news for...

The Food Code is not a law

The national Food Code is a model document. Each state and county decides how much of it to adopt, which is why food safety rules change when you cross a state line and why your card may not trans...

Optional boosts

Food protection manager certification. Butchery. Baking and pastry. Allergen and alcohol service training.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Cooks, Restaurant (35-2014.00)

Food and Drug Administration: the Food Code

ServSafe, National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation

The Culinary Institute of America

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/cook>



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