CAREER KIT

Pharmacy Technician Career Kit: 90-Day Action Plan

How to Become a Pharmacy Technician

2026-10 edition

Inside: at-a-glance summary · step-by-step path · costs & requirements · 90-day action plan · documents checklist · exams · interview questions · resume bullets · common mistakes · 13-week tracker · resources

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SECTION 1

At a glance

Most pharmacy technicians start with a high school diploma and either train on the job or complete a short pharmacy technician program, often a certificate of a year or less. Most states regulate pharmacy technicians, usually through registration or licensure with the state board of pharmacy, and some require national certification such as PTCB's CPhT or NHA's ExCPT. Many people are working within 3–12 months.

Timeline	3–12 months for most people
Typical cost	$0–$5,000 for most training programs (on-the-job training is often free)
Education	High school diploma or GED; on-the-job training or a pharmacy technician certificate
License	Varies by state: most states require registration or licensure with the board of pharmacy; some require national certification
Median pay	$45,750 per year
Job outlook	+6% (2025–35), faster than average; about 44,700 openings a year

SECTION 2

Step-by-step path

1. Finish high school or get your GED

Time: Varies

A high school diploma or equivalent is the typical requirement for training programs, national certification, and most state boards. Math, chemistry, and biology classes help, because the job involves dosage calculations and drug names.

2. Check your state board of pharmacy rules

Time: 1 week

Most states regulate pharmacy technicians, but the rules differ. Depending on the state, you may need to register as a technician-in-training, complete a board-approved program, pass a national exam, pay a fee, and pass a criminal background check. Texas, for example, requires technicians to pass the PTCB or ExCPT exam before registering as a pharmacy technician.

3. Choose your training route

Time: 1–2 weeks

You can train on the job at a retail chain or hospital, or complete a pharmacy technician program at a community college or vocational school. For national certification, PTCB accepts either a PTCB-recognized education or training program or at least 500 hours of work experience as a pharmacy technician. Some retail chains run their own recognized training programs for employees.

4. Complete training and register with your state

Time: 3–12 months · Cost: $0–$5,000

Training covers drug names and classes, prescription processing, dosage calculations, pharmacy law and ethics, medication safety, inventory, and insurance billing. Many states have you register as a technician or technician-in-training before you start working in a pharmacy. Hospital and sterile compounding jobs may require extra training.

5. Pass a national certification exam

Time: 4–8 weeks of study · Cost: $129 for the PTCE

The two main exams are the Pharmacy Technician Certification Exam (PTCE) from PTCB, which leads to the CPhT credential, and the ExCPT from NHA. Some states and many employers require certification, and even where it is optional it can help you get hired and earn more. The PTCE has 90 multiple-choice questions and runs 1 hour 50 minutes.

6. Get hired at a pharmacy

Time: 2–8 weeks

Retail pharmacies, grocery and big-box stores, hospitals, mail-order pharmacies, and long-term care pharmacies all hire technicians. Hospitals often prefer certified technicians with some experience. Put your state registration number and certification on your resume.

7. Keep your credentials current

Time: Ongoing

PTCB requires CPhTs to recertify every two years with continuing education. Your state registration or license also has its own renewal cycle and fees. Track your deadlines so you never work with an expired registration.

SECTION 3

Costs & requirements

Estimated costs (USD)

Item	Low	High	Note
Pharmacy technician certificate program	$500	$5,000	Typical range, varies by school; employer-run training is often free
Associate degree in pharmacy technology	$6,000	$25,000	Typical range, varies by school; optional for most jobs
PTCB PTCE exam (CPhT)	$129	$129	Fee listed by PTCB; check NHA for the current ExCPT fee
State registration or license fee	$25	$150	Varies by state; check your board of pharmacy
Background check or fingerprints	$20	$100	Varies by state
Study guides and practice tests	$0	$150	Typical range; some programs include them
Total	**$6,674**	**$30,529**	

Requirements

Education	High school diploma or equivalent is typical. Training can be on the job or through a postsecondary certificate program; some programs lead to an associate degree.
State registration or license	Varies by state. Most states regulate pharmacy technicians through the board of pharmacy, and requirements can include a training program, an exam, fees, continuing education, a background check, and a minimum age.
National certification	Required by some states (Texas, for example, requires PTCB or ExCPT certification to register) and by many employers. PTCB's CPhT and NHA's ExCPT are the main options.
PTCB eligibility	Complete a PTCB-recognized education/training program (or be within 60 days of finishing), or have at least 500 hours of pharmacy technician work experience.
Background check	State boards and employers commonly run criminal background checks because you handle controlled substances.
Skills	Accurate math, attention to detail, knowledge of drug names, customer service, and comfort with pharmacy software.

SECTION 4

90-Day Action Plan

Tick each box as you finish the task. Do the phases in order; it is fine if a phase takes a little longer.

Phase 1: Learn your state's rules and start training

Days 1–30

Goal: Know exactly what your state requires and get into training.

- ☐ Read your state board of pharmacy's technician requirements and fees
- ☐ Decide between on-the-job training and a PTCB-recognized program
- ☐ Ask local retail and hospital pharmacies whether they hire and train trainees
- ☐ Register as a technician-in-training if your state requires it
- ☐ Start learning the top 200 drugs (brand, generic, and class)
- ☐ Set a weekly study schedule

Phase 2: Build core skills

Days 31–60

Goal: Get strong at the math, drugs, and laws the exam and job require.

- ☐ Practice dosage, days-supply, and conversion calculations daily
- ☐ Learn controlled substance schedules and basic federal pharmacy law
- ☐ Review medication safety: look-alike/sound-alike drugs and error prevention
- ☐ Get comfortable with prescription intake and insurance claim basics
- ☐ Log your training or work hours toward PTCB eligibility
- ☐ Take a first full-length practice exam to find weak areas

Phase 3: Certify and get hired

Days 61–90

Goal: Pass the PTCE or ExCPT and land a pharmacy technician job.

- [ ] Confirm eligibility and schedule the PTCE or ExCPT
- [ ] Take at least three timed practice exams
- [ ] Update your state registration status after you certify, if required
- [ ] Write a one-page resume with your registration number and certification
- [ ] Apply to 5–10 retail, hospital, and mail-order pharmacy jobs per week
- [ ] Practice the interview questions in this kit
- [ ] Set reminders for PTCB recertification and state renewal dates

SECTION 5

Documents checklist

Gather these early. Keep originals in one folder and scans in the cloud.

- [ ] High school diploma or GED
- [ ] Government-issued photo ID
- [ ] Training program certificate or proof of work hours
- [ ] State technician or technician-in-training registration
- [ ] PTCB or NHA exam confirmation and certificate
- [ ] Background check or fingerprint results (if required)
- [ ] Resume and list of 3 references
- [ ] Continuing education records for renewals

SECTION 6

Exams & how to prepare

PTCE (Pharmacy Technician Certification Exam) by PTCB

What it is: 90 multiple-choice questions (80 scored) in 1 hour 50 minutes, covering medications, federal requirements, patient safety and quality assurance, and order entry and processing. Passing earns the CPhT credential, renewed every two years.

How to prepare: 4–8 weeks of review using PTCB's content outline and practice exams.

ExCPT (Exam for the Certification of Pharmacy Technicians) by NHA

What it is: National certification exam accepted by many state boards and employers, including in Texas. Eligibility is based on a training program or work experience.

How to prepare: 4–6 weeks using NHA's study guide and practice tests.

SECTION 7

Interview questions

1. Why do you want to be a pharmacy technician?

Tip: Mention accuracy, patient safety, and interest in medications.

2. How do you make sure you fill a prescription correctly?

Tip: Describe checking the drug, strength, quantity, and patient against the order, and the pharmacist's final check.

3. What would you do if a patient asked you about side effects?

Tip: Say you would refer them to the pharmacist; technicians do not counsel patients.

4. How would you handle a customer upset about an insurance rejection?

Tip: Stay calm, explain options clearly, and involve the pharmacist or insurer as needed.

5. Tell me about the controlled substance schedules.

Tip: Give a short overview of Schedules I–V and examples of how handling differs.

6. Calculate the days supply for this prescription.

Tip: Show your work out loud; employers want to see a clear method.

7. How do you handle a busy rush with a long line and phone calls?

Tip: Explain prioritizing safety, triaging tasks, and asking for help.

8. What would you do if you noticed a possible error?

Tip: Stop and alert the pharmacist right away; never fix it quietly yourself.

9. What pharmacy software have you used?

Tip: Name the system and what you did with it, such as data entry or claims.

10. Are you certified or registered in this state?

Tip: Have your registration number ready and give a date if you are still testing.

11. How do you protect patient privacy at the counter?

Tip: Mention HIPAA, quiet voices, verifying identity, and secure disposal.

12. Where do you see yourself in five years?

Tip: Mention hospital or specialty work, a lead tech role, or pharmacy school.

SECTION 8

Resume bullet examples

Adapt these to what you actually did. Use numbers wherever you can.

- Completed a PTCB-recognized pharmacy technician certificate program
- Earned the CPhT credential by passing the PTCE on the first attempt
- Entered and processed 150+ prescriptions per shift with high accuracy
- Resolved insurance claim rejections and prior authorization requests
- Counted, packaged, and labeled medications for pharmacist verification
- Managed inventory and controlled substance counts under pharmacist supervision
- Provided courteous customer service at the pickup and drop-off counters
- Registered pharmacy technician with the state board of pharmacy

SECTION 9

Common mistakes to avoid

1. Starting work before checking whether your state requires registration first
2. Paying for a program that does not qualify you for the PTCE or ExCPT
3. Skipping drug name memorization and relying only on practice tests
4. Answering patient questions about medications that only the pharmacist should answer
5. Letting your state registration or CPhT lapse
6. Applying only to retail jobs when hospitals in your area may pay more

SECTION 10

13-week progress tracker

Fill this in by hand each week.

Week	Focus	Done?	Notes
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			

SECTION 11

Resources, salary & disclaimer

Resources

- **Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (PTCB)**

https://www.ptcb.org

- **National Healthcareer Association (NHA)**

https://www.nhanow.com

- **NABP: Find your state board of pharmacy**

https://nabp.pharmacy/about/boards-of-pharmacy/

- **BLS: Pharmacy Technicians**

https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/pharmacy-technicians.htm

- **ASHP: Pharmacy technician resources**

https://www.ashp.org

Salary

Bottom 10%	Median	Top 10%
Less than $36,020	**$45,750 per year ($22.00 per hour)**	More than $61,040

Outlook: BLS projects employment of pharmacy technicians to grow 6% from 2025 to 2035, faster than the average for all occupations, with about 44,700 openings each year. There were about 471,200 pharmacy technician jobs in 2025.

Source: BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook, May 2025 wage data; projections 2025–35 — https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/pharmacy-technicians.htm

Disclaimer. Requirements vary by state and change over time. Verify with the official sources listed. This guide is not legal or career advice.