

Chefs and Head Cooks

SOC: 35-1011 • Career Profile Report

■ Key Facts

\$60,990

Median Salary

197,300

Employment

+7.0%

Growth Rate

■ Requirements & Salary Range

Education: High school diploma

■ Automation Risk Assessment

Low Risk - 18.0% probability of being automated in the next 10-20 years.

This job is relatively safe from automation due to its creative, social, or complex problem-solving requirements.

■■ Work-Life Balance

3.2/10 - Challenging work-life balance

■ Personality Fit (RIASEC)

Higher scores indicate better personality fit for this career type.

Realistic	7.0/10	Investigative	3.8/10
Artistic	4.6/10	Social	7.6/10
Enterprising	5.2/10	Conventional	6.0/10

■ Top Skills Required

Business skills, Communication skills, Creativity, Dexterity, Leadership skills, Physical stamina, Sense of taste and smell, Time-management skills

✓ Strengths

- High Demand
- Flexible Work
- Continuous Learning

■ Challenges

- Burnout Risk
- Rapid Technological Change

■ What They Do

Chefs and Head Cooks are culinary leaders who plan, direct, and execute **food preparation and kitchen operations** in restaurants, hotels, catering services, and institutional dining. They combine creativity with management skill to deliver high-quality meals, maintain kitchen efficiency, and ensure food safety. Their work shapes dining experiences and influences culinary trends.

This career is well suited for individuals who are passionate about cooking, thrive in fast-paced environments, and enjoy leading kitchen teams.

What Do Chefs and Head Cooks Do?

Chefs and head cooks oversee both culinary creation and kitchen management.

Common responsibilities include:

- Planning menus and developing recipes
- Preparing and cooking food to high standards
- Managing kitchen staff and assigning tasks
- Ensuring food quality, presentation, and consistency
- Monitoring inventory, ordering supplies, and controlling costs
- Enforcing food safety, sanitation, and hygiene standards
- Training staff in cooking techniques and kitchen procedures

Types of Chef Roles

Chefs and head cooks may specialize by cuisine or kitchen structure:

- Executive Chefs: Lead entire kitchen operations and menu strategy.
- Head Cooks: Manage daily food preparation and kitchen staff.
- Sous Chefs: Assist with supervision and cooking leadership.
- Pastry Chefs: Specialize in baked goods and desserts.
- Specialty Cuisine Chefs: Focus on specific regional or cultural cuisines.

Skills and Abilities Needed

Chefs and head cooks combine culinary expertise with leadership and organization.

Core Professional Skills

Personal Qualities That Matter

Education and Training Pathway

Chefs typically advance through hands-on experience and training:

- High School Diploma or Equivalent: Typical minimum requirement
- Culinary School or Training Programs (common): Formal culinary education
- Apprenticeships or On-the-Job Training: Learning under experienced chefs
- Food Safety Certification: Often required
- Continued Skill Development: Exploring new techniques and cuisines

Where Do Chefs and Head Cooks Work?

Chefs work in diverse food service environments:

- Restaurants and Fine Dining Establishments
- Hotels and Resorts

- Catering and Event Services
- Hospitals, Schools, and Institutions
- Cruise Ships and Entertainment Venues

Work schedules often include nights, weekends, and holidays.

How Much Do Chefs and Head Cooks Earn?

Earnings vary by experience, location, and establishment type:

- Entry-Level Cooks: Earn hourly wages while gaining experience
- Experienced Head Cooks or Sous Chefs: Earn higher pay
- Executive Chefs: Often earn higher salaries with leadership responsibility

Compensation may include bonuses, tips, or profit sharing.

Is This Career Difficult?

This career is physically demanding and high-pressure. Chefs must manage tight deadlines, long hours, and demanding service periods while maintaining quality and safety. The challenge lies in balancing creativity, speed, and leadership in fast-paced kitchens.

Who Should Consider Becoming a Chef or Head Cook?

This career may be a strong fit if you:

- Love cooking and creating food
- Thrive in fast-paced, hands-on environments
- Enjoy leading and mentoring others
- Can handle long hours and physical work
- Want a creative yet practical career

How to Prepare Early

- Practice cooking and experimenting with recipes
- Learn basic knife skills and food safety
- Work in entry-level kitchen roles
- Study culinary arts or hospitality programs
- Build stamina and time-management skills

Chefs and head cooks transform ingredients into experiences—combining creativity, leadership, and discipline to deliver meals that nourish, delight, and define the character of kitchens and dining rooms alike.

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Source: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/food-preparation-and-serving/chefs-and-head-cooks.htm>