PHARM TECH BASICS · ONE-PAGER

ExCPT Exam Guide

The NHA ExCPT under the 2023 test plan: format, scoring, eligibility, the five domains, how it differs from the PTCE, and a 6-week study plan

13 sources + more detail
pharmtechbasics.com/sheets/guide-nha-excpt.html
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1 The exam at a glance

FEATURE	DETAIL
Items	120 multiple choice: 100 scored, 20 pretest (not marked, do not count)
Time	2 hours 10 minutes, one continuous session
Passing	Scaled score of 390 on a 200 to 500 scale
Fee	Listed in the NHA Shop; paid when you apply. Each retake costs the full fee.
Where	PSI test center, live remote proctoring at home, or your school or employer if it is an NHA test site
Eligibility	High school diploma or equivalent, plus a pharmacy technician training program in the past 5 years or 1,200 hours of supervised pharmacy-related work in a 1-year period within the last 3 years
Results	Score report in your NHA account within 48 hours (PSI and remote exams)
Credential	NHA Certified Pharmacy Technician (CPhT), valid 2 years
Test plan	2023 job analysis; exams scheduled on or after July 9, 2025

2 What is on it

Scored items per form, from the NHA 2023 ExCPT Test Plan. Total 100.

DOMAIN	ITEMS	WHAT IT ASKS
1. Role, Responsibilities and General Duties	15	Technician versus pharmacist tasks, security, inventory, storage, expired and recalled stock, disposal, references
2. Laws	15	A. Laws and regulations (9): HIPAA, FDCA and amendments, CMEA, OBRA 90, PPPA, DSCSA, record keeping. B. Controlled substances (6): schedules, DEA numbers and forms, fills and refills
3. Drugs and Drug Therapy	13	A. Classification (8): classes, dosage forms, routes, Rx, OTC and BTC uses. B. Frequently prescribed (5): brand and generic names, side effects, interactions, vaccines
4. Dispensing Process	43	A. Intake and entry (13). B. Preparing and dispensing (13). C. Calculations (7). D. Sterile and non-sterile compounding, unit dose and repackaging (10)
5. Medication and Patient Safety and Quality Assurance	14	Look-alike/sound-alike and high-alert drugs, error-prone abbreviations, error reporting, NIOSH handling, adherence

EXAM TIP Dispensing Process is 43 of the 100 scored items, more than any two other domains together. Intake, billing, dispensing, math and compounding all sit here.

3 How it differs from the PTCE

- Still tested on the ExCPT, dropped from the 2026 PTCE: non-sterile compounding and alligation.
- On the ExCPT test plan, not listed in the PTCE outline: sterile compounding and aseptic technique, business math (markup, gross and net profit), third-party billing (BIN, PCN, rejections, prior authorization, coordination of benefits), DAW codes, general inventory management such as PAR levels (the PTCE names ordering only for controlled substances), and pediatric dose rules (Young's, Clark's, Fried's).
- Longer: 120 items in 2 hours 10 minutes, against 90 items in a 2-hour PTCE appointment.
- Different scales: 390 on 200 to 500 (ExCPT) versus 1,400 on 1,000 to 1,600 (PTCE).
- The ExCPT can be taken at home with a live remote proctor; PTCB's CPhT page lists only in-person Pearson test centers.

EXAM TIP A book or practice test written only for the 2026 PTCE may leave out compounding, alligation and billing. For the ExCPT, study them.

4 How to study: 6 weeks

1. Week 1: Read the free test plan. Set your exam date in Settings. Take a timed Mock Exam (120 items, 130 minutes) as a baseline. Then Domain 1 with the Storage, Recalls, Returns and Disposal page.
2. Week 2: Drugs and Drug Therapy: the drug cards by class and Pharmacology by Class and Suffix. Daily Review every day from here on.
3. Week 3: Laws: HIPAA in the Pharmacy, Poison Prevention Packaging Act, OBRA 90, DEA Schedules, Forms and Controlled Prescriptions, then the CMEA and DSCSA pages.
4. Week 4: Intake and dispensing: Prescription Intake and Processing, Sig Codes and Pharmacy Abbreviations, and Recalls, REMS, Medication Guides and Reporting. Learn BIN, PCN, DAW codes and rejections.
5. Week 5: Calculations and compounding: Pharmacy Math with the Days Supply, Dilution, Alligation, Percent and Ratio Strength, Milligrams and Milliequivalents, and Markup and Gross Profit calculators; Compounding and Beyond-Use Dates; Hazardous Drugs.
6. Week 6: Medication Safety and Error Prevention. A second Mock Exam, then Weakest Subject, Missed Questions and Trouble Questions. Rest the day before.

EXAM TIP If all 130 minutes are for items, you get about 65 seconds each. The app Mock Exam uses the full sitting: 120 items in 130 minutes.

5 Test-day tips

- Bring a current government-issued photo ID with your signature and permanent address. The name must match your registration exactly. If the address differs, bring proof such as a current utility bill.
- Use the calculator built into the exam. Personal calculators and your computer's calculator are not allowed.
- PSI centers give you a whiteboard and marker; remote exams have a digital whiteboard.
- Remote: run PSI's system check first. No breaks, no leaving the room, no one else in the room.
- In person: time out of the room still counts against your clock. No food or drink without an approved accommodation.
- You cannot tell pretest items from scored ones. Give every item full effort, and answer every item: a blank cannot earn credit.
- Need to move the date? With PSI (center or remote), reschedule at least 24 hours ahead, or the fee is lost. At a school or employer site, ask the site before the exam starts.

6 Official resources

- CPhT certification page: nhanow.com/certifications/pharmacy-technician
- 2023 ExCPT Test Plan (free PDF): linked from the certification page
- Candidate Handbook: knowledge.nhanow.com/nha-candidate-handbook
- Help Center (scheduling, results, renewal): knowledge.nhanow.com
- NHA study products (Online Study Guide, Practice Tests, Preparation Package) and the exam fee: the Shop at store.nhanow.com

NHA says buying its study materials is not required to sit for the exam and does not guarantee a pass.

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