

Deciding on a Career in Medicine

Should I become a doctor?

Think about what kind of future appeals to you. Do you like challenges? Are you interested in science and how the body works? Do you care deeply about other people, their problems, and their pain? Are you a good listener? Do you enjoy learning? Are you intrigued by the ways medicine can be used to improve life?

If you answered “Yes” to most of these questions, chances are you have the right personality for a career in medicine. Talk to career counselor or pre-health advisor to learn more about if this is the right choice for you.

What is a doctor’s job like?

Physicians diagnose and care for people of all ages who are ill or have been injured. They take medical histories, perform physical examinations, conduct diagnostic tests, recommend and provide treatment, and advise patients on their overall health and well-being.

While there are several different types of physicians, they can usually be divided into three broad categories:

- **Primary care physicians** are the doctors patients usually visit most frequently. They treat a wide range of illnesses and regularly provide preventive care, and they also enjoy long-term relationships with their patients. Pediatricians, family practitioners and general internists are primary care physicians.
- **Surgeons** perform operations to treat diseases and repair injuries.
- **Specialists** have expertise related to specific diseases as well as body parts, organs, and systems. Cardiologists, Oncologists, Neurologists, and ophthalmologists are examples of specialists. The [AAMC’s Careers in Medicine](#) website contains information and links about various specialties in medicine.

MORE INFORMATION

Careers in Medicine specialty information:

www.aamc.org/cim/specialty/list

Information about financing a medical education:

www.aamc.org/first

How much education does it take to become a doctor?

Becoming a doctor requires a serious educational commitment. It typically takes from 11 to 16 years to complete your education, including four years of college (undergraduate school), four years of medical school and anywhere from three to eight years of training in a specific specialty area (residency training), depending on which specialty you choose to pursue. In order to maintain a medical license, doctors are also required to continue taking courses and learning about advancements in their field throughout their career.

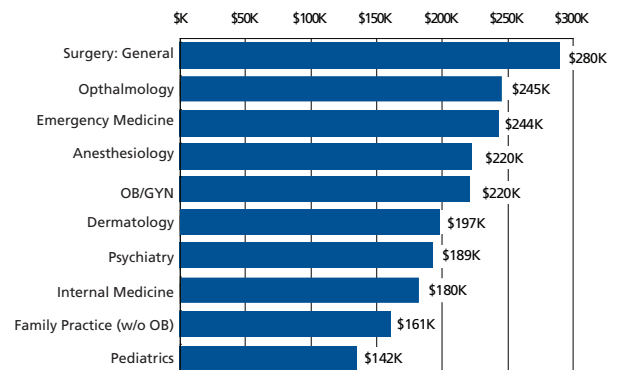
What is the lifestyle and salary like?

While salaries for physicians are among the highest for all occupations, the work hours can be long and unpredictable. Many doctors work more than 60 hours a week. They may also have to respond to emergencies and be on call for their patients. Work hours vary depending on the type, size and location of practice.

Salaries vary depending on where physicians live and the type of medical specialty they practice. The graph below will give you an idea of median starting salaries by specialty.

SAMPLE SPECIALTIES AND SALARIES:

Median Starting Salary: First Year Post Residency or Fellowship Compensation



Source: Physician Placement Starting Salary Survey: 2013 Report Based on 2012 Data. Reprinted with permission from the Medical Group Management Association, 104 Inverness Terrace East, Englewood, Colorado 80112-5306; 303.799.1111. www.mgma.com Copyright 2012.