

# Premedical Student **TIP SHEET**



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One of the most important decisions that you will ever make is your career choice. Be realistic about the challenges and rewards of a career in medicine. Competition for admission to medical school is intense, and the coursework that follows requires an individual to think critically and employ discipline. The profession of medicine requires a unique commitment to serving others. Physicians must effectively communicate with patients, develop relationships, engage in complex problem-solving and participate in life-long learning. Though the path to a career in medicine is a long one, it is intellectually challenging, financially secure, and personally rewarding.

## Choosing a major and course of study

- Medical school admissions committees have no preference for one major or degree over another. Choose a major in which you have a real interest.
- Take English, biology, inorganic chemistry, organic chemistry, physics, and math (college algebra or above) no matter your major.
- Research admission requirements, timing, and other factors during your freshman and sophomore years. Go to [aamc.org/students/aspiring](http://aamc.org/students/aspiring).

## Key factors in medical school acceptance

- Overall academic record
- Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) scores
- Faculty member evaluations
- Quality personal statement
- Work and volunteer experience, particularly in a health care setting
- Personal interviews
- Extracurricular activities and leadership positions
- Research or community service activities

## Academic record

- Though GPA is important, admissions committees seek students who demonstrate a balance between their academic success and other interests.
- The average undergraduate GPA of allopathic medical school applicants in 2011 was 3.53.
- The average undergraduate GPA of allopathic medical school matriculants in 2011 was 3.67.
- The average GPA of osteopathic medical school applicants in 2011 was 3.41.

## Know when to seek help

- Set up a meeting with pre-health and/or premedical advisors to talk about your interests.
- Visit with your course instructors during designated office hours, especially if you aren't having the academic success you've had in the past.
- Attending summer school may be helpful for more challenging courses, as it often involves fewer distractions.
- Think ahead. Seek tutoring opportunities from faculty, graduate assistants, students, and peers on the first day of class.

## MCAT

- The Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) is a standardized test that consists of four sections: biological and biochemical foundations of living systems; chemical and physical foundations of biological systems; psychological, social, and biological foundations of behavior; and critical analysis and reasoning skills.
- All U.S. medical schools require the test, with the exception of very few special consideration programs.
- The MCAT is a computerized test that takes approximately five hours to complete.
- You can take the MCAT a maximum of three times per year.
- You can register and schedule your MCAT exam online.
- Medical school admissions officers usually suggest that you take the test in the calendar year prior to the year in which you plan to enter medical school.
- If you have financial limitations, you can apply for fee assistance.
- Learn more about the MCAT through video tutorials, sample questions, and more at [aamc.org/students/applying/mcat](http://aamc.org/students/applying/mcat).

# Premedical Student Tip Sheet, continued

## Extracurricular activities and work experience

- Medical school admission committees look for students who demonstrate not only academic ability, but motivation by engaging in extracurricular activities such as working, volunteering, and caring for family.
- Don't overdo extracurricular activities if you have difficulty making time to study.
- Seek work experiences and volunteer activities in health care settings.
- If you do primary research, be prepared to discuss the details of your project and how your experience will help you be a good physician to your patients.

## SHADOWING GUIDELINES FOR PREMEDICAL STUDENTS

Shadowing physicians in various settings gives you a feel for the different types of work physicians do and the settings in which they practice.

### Finding shadowing opportunities

Contact hospitals, physicians' offices, community health centers, outpatient surgery centers, nursing homes, and athletic training centers. Recognize that federal laws designed to protect patients' privacy may limit the settings and situations you are permitted to observe. If you aren't granted permission in one setting or practice, try another.

- Contact your family doctor.
- Some hospitals have an application process that is available via their website.
- Other opportunities may be provided by medical schools, Area Health Education Centers, and state medical associations.

### What to wear

Whether in a hospital, clinic or physician's practice, your dress and appearance should be professional but comfortable. Use the following guidelines:

- Wear flat, comfortable shoes, but avoid sandals, open-toe, or athletic shoes.
- Men should wear nice dress pants and a pressed shirt. Shirts should be tucked in. Ties are optional but often not necessary.
- Women should wear dressy pants and a conservative top. Avoid clothing that is revealing or exposes undergarments.
- Avoid excessive jewelry or fragrances.

### Preparation

- Call to confirm the date and arrival time the day before your visit.
- Clarify what you might expect to experience during your shadowing experience.
- A physician who precepts students in a clinical setting is often known as a preceptor.
- A hospital or practice may require you to participate in training before you can shadow the physician. Don't miss this training.
- Address your preceptor as "Doctor" (i.e., Dr. Smith).
- Prepare three questions for your preceptor and send them in advance of your visit.

- If you are not feeling well on the day of your visit, reschedule it for another time.
- Keep in mind that during your visit, the preceptor's main responsibility is to meet his/her patients' needs — likely there won't be time to talk during patient encounters. Arrive on time and be prepared for occasional downtime. The physician may be called away unexpectedly. If so, use this time to talk with others in the practice about their role.

### How to shadow effectively

- Do exactly what your preceptor or the staff asks you to do.
- Avoid asking the patient questions or asking the doctor questions in front of the patient.
- Respect patient confidentiality and privacy. Do not talk about the patient or their information at any time.
- Allow the physician to introduce you to the patient but don't be concerned if they don't.
- Avoid taking notes during patient visits. General notes about your experience can be made after the clinical session.
- It is appropriate to volunteer to help with appropriate tasks if the physician or staff asks you.
- If at any time during a procedure you feel lightheaded or dizzy, alert the physician and leave the patient's room to sit down.
- Have a good time.

### Resource list for a medical career

- American Medical Student Association (AMSA) — [www.amsa.org](http://www.amsa.org)
- Aspiring Docs — [www.aspiringdocs.org](http://www.aspiringdocs.org)
- Explore Health Careers — [www.explorehealthcareers.org](http://www.explorehealthcareers.org)
- National Area Health Education Center Organization — [www.nationalahec.org](http://www.nationalahec.org)
- Student National Medical Association (SNMA) Minority Association of Pre-Medical Students (MAPS) — [www.snma.org](http://www.snma.org)
- Student Osteopathic Medical Association (SOMA) — [www.studentdo.com](http://www.studentdo.com)
- Ventures Scholars Program — [www.venturescholar.org](http://www.venturescholar.org)
- Family Medicine Interest Group (FMIG) — [www.aafp.org/fmig](http://www.aafp.org/fmig)