

# Cardiac Surgeon

Operate on the heart: bypasses, valves, transplants. Six years of residency, very high pay, and one of the tightest job markets in Canadian medicine.

## TYPICAL PAY

**\$620,000**

a year, full time

## PAY RANGE

**\$400k to \$850k**

starting to experienced

## TIME TO QUALIFY

**13 to 16 years**

after high school

## DEMAND

**Moderate**

job outlook

## LICENCE NEEDED

**Yes**

regulated job

## WHERE YOU WORK

**Heart centres at large teaching hospitals, operating rooms, intens...**

## How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12  
Top marks in biology, chemistry, math and English. A very high average is the entry ticket.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 3 to 4 years  
Any major, usually life sciences. High GPA, research, volunteering. Write the MCAT (medical school admission test).
- 3 Medical school, the MD (doctor of medicine)** 3 to 4 years  
Acceptance rates are 5 to 15%. Cardiac surgery electives and research in your final year are essential for the match.
- 4 Cardiac surgery residency** 6 years  
Matched through CaRMS (the residency matching service). Paid, supervised. Time in general surgery, cardiology and intensive care before you spend years in the heart operating room.
- 5 Royal College exam, licence, fellowship** 1 to 2 years  
Pass the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada exam, register with your provincial College of Physicians and Surgeons. Almost everyone does a 1 to 2 year fellowship.

## Pros and cons

- + Among the highest paid jobs in Canada
- + You stop a heart, fix it, and restart it
- + Elite, small community with deep expertise
- Up to 16 years of training and only 10 to 15 residency spots a year
- Very few jobs, often none in the city you want
- Long operations, long days, and heavy call

## Optional boosts

Heart transplant and mechanical support. Aortic surgery. Minimally invasive valve surgery. Congenital (children's) heart surgery.

## Good to know

### The pacemaker started in Toronto

In 1950, Toronto surgeon Wilfred Bigelow and his team built one of the first pacemakers while researching how to cool the body for heart surgery. His cooling technique made early open-heart operations po...

### The heart is stopped on purpose

For most operations a heart-lung machine takes over pumping and breathing, and the surgeon stops the heart with a cold potassium solution. It restarts when warm blood flows back, usually on its own.

### Where these numbers come from

Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada  
CIHI: Physicians in Canada  
CaRMS: the residency match  
Job Bank: Surgeons, wages (updated Nov 2025)

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in Canadian dollars, based on Government of Canada Job Bank wage data and published salary grids. They vary by province, employer and experience. Tuition is for domestic students. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/ca/careers/cardiac-surgeon>



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