

# Cardiac Surgeon

Operate on hearts. The longest training on this site, and near the top of the pay scale.

## TYPICAL PAY

**\$414,010**

a year, full time

## PAY RANGE

**\$78k to \$720k**

starting to experienced

## TIME TO QUALIFY

**14 to 16 years**

after high school

## DEMAND

**Moderate**

job outlook

## LICENCE NEEDED

**Yes**

regulated job

## WHERE YOU WORK

**Hospital operating rooms, intensive care units, clinics**

## How you get there

- 1 Bachelor's degree** 4 years  
 Any major, but you must finish the pre-medicine science courses and keep a very high grade average. Write the MCAT (Medical College Admission Test).
- 2 Medical school** 4 years  
 An MD (doctor of medicine) or DO (doctor of osteopathic medicine) degree. Two years of science, then two years of clinical rotations in hospitals.
- 3 Surgical training** 6 to 8 years  
 Two routes. The integrated route is a 6-year cardiothoracic residency straight out of medical school. The traditional route is a 5-year general surgery residency followed by a 2 to 3 year cardiothoracic fellowship.
- 4 Board certification** After training  
 Pass the written and oral examinations of the American Board of Thoracic Surgery. Congenital heart surgery is a further certificate on top.
- 5 State medical license** During and after training  
 Granted by the medical board of the state you practice in, after you have passed all three steps of the national licensing examination.

## Pros and cons

- + Among the highest paid work in the country
- + You fix things that would otherwise kill people, quickly and visibly
- + Total job security and demand in every state
- Fourteen to sixteen years before you are fully qualified
- Around \$200,000 of debt is normal
- Long operations, nights on call, and a heavy toll on family life

## Good to know

### A machine does the heart's job during surgery

Cardiopulmonary bypass, the heart-lung machine, pumps and oxygenates blood so the heart can be stopped and opened. It is run by a clinical perfusionist, a separate career with its own training.

### It is a tiny profession

The federal data counts about 25,100 people in the whole Surgeons, All Other category in 2024, with roughly 600 openings a year projected. Cardiac surgeons are a slice of that.

## Optional boosts

Adult cardiac surgery. Congenital heart surgery. Transplant and mechanical support. Aortic surgery.

### Where these numbers come from

O\*NET OnLine: Surgeons, All Other (29-1249.00)  
 American Board of Thoracic Surgery  
 Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education  
 United States Medical Licensing Examination

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/cardiac-surgeon>



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