

Clinical Perfusionist

Run the heart-lung machine during open heart surgery. While the heart is stopped, you are the circulation.

TYPICAL PAY

\$160,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$135k to \$180k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

5 to 7 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Hospital operating rooms, cardiac surgery teams, intensive care units

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Biology, chemistry, physics and as much math as you can take.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Biology, chemistry, biomedical science or nursing. Programs want anatomy, physiology, chemistry and statistics on your transcript.
- 3 Health care experience** 1 to 2 years, often
Most successful applicants worked first as a respiratory therapist, nurse, surgical technologist or cardiovascular technologist. Shadow a perfusionist before you apply.
- 4 Accredited perfusion program** About 2 years
About two years, usually ending in a master's degree. Classroom first, then clinical rotations where you run real cases under supervision.
- 5 Board certification** During and after the program
Log the required minimum number of clinical cases, then pass the Perfusion Basic Science Examination and the Clinical Applications in Perfusion Examination to become a Certified Clinical Perfusionist.

Pros and cons

- + Small field, real scarcity, strong bargaining position
- + You are a named member of the surgical team, not a helper
- + Technical and physiological work that never gets boring
- The patient's life is literally running through your machine
- Early starts, long cases and on-call nights
- Few programs, so admission is competitive and you may have to move

Good to know

The first machine ran in 1953

John Gibbon used a heart-lung machine on a human for the first successful time in 1953 in Philadelphia. Every open heart operation since has depended on someone running one.

Two exams stand between you and the title

The American Board of Cardiovascular Perfusion certifies perfusionists with the Perfusion Basic Science Examination and the Clinical Applications in Perfusion Examination. Pass both and you are a Certified Clinical Perfusionist.

Optional boosts

Extracorporeal membrane oxygenation specialist. Blood management certifications. Ventricular assist device training. Pediatric perfusion.

Where these numbers come from

Salary.com: clinical perfusionist pay, September 2026

O*NET: Health Technologists and Technicians, All Other (29-2099.00), the catch-all federal code perfusion falls into

American Board of Cardiovascular Perfusion

American Society of Extracorporeal Technology

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/clinical-perfusionist>



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