

Neurosurgeon

Operate on the brain, spine and nerves. The longest training of any doctor in the country, the highest pay in medicine, and a tiny number of jobs.

TYPICAL PAY

\$749,140

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$414k to \$876k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

15 to 16 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Large teaching hospitals, trauma centers, operating rooms, intensi...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Biology, chemistry, physics and math, with the grades for a competitive college. Start building the habit of working long hours now.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Any major, plus the pre-medical science courses and the MCAT (Medical College Admission Test).
- 3 Medical school** 4 years
Classroom science, then hospital rotations. Neurosurgery applicants usually need research published and very strong grades.
- 4 Neurosurgery residency** 7 years
Seven years, including the internship year and often a year of research. The longest residency in American medicine.
- 5 Board certification** After residency
The American Board of Neurological Surgery requires exams plus a period in practice before you are fully certified.
- 6 Fellowship, if you want one** 1 year
Pediatric, spine, skull base, vascular or tumor. Optional, and adds another year.

Pros and cons

- + The highest paid specialty in American medicine
- + Work that visibly saves lives, and you see it happen
- + Skill that almost nobody else in the hospital has
- Fifteen years of training and seven of them at 80 hour weeks
- The worst outcomes in medicine happen in your operating room
- Malpractice exposure is the highest of any specialty

Good to know

The government does not track the job

There is no neurosurgeon line in the federal wage survey. The job is folded into a category called surgeons, all other, which is why every published neurosurgery salary comes from a private compensation s...

Only 8,000 have ever been certified

The American Board of Neurological Surgery has certified just over 8,000 neurosurgeons since it was founded in 1940. That is the whole history of the specialty in this country.

Optional boosts

Spine. Cerebrovascular. Pediatric neurosurgery. Skull base and tumor.

Where these numbers come from

O*NET OnLine: Surgeons, All Other (29-1249.00)
American Board of Neurological Surgery
American Association of Neurological Surgeons
Doximity 2025 Physician Compensation Report

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/neurosurgeon>



Scan for the full clicker