

Ophthalmologist

The eye surgeon. Twelve years of training, operations measured in fractions of a millimeter, and patients who can see again the next morning.

TYPICAL PAY

\$300,080

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$100k to \$490k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

12 to 13 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Eye clinics, hospital operating rooms, day surgery centers, acad...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 9 to 12
Biology, chemistry, physics and calculus. Grades matter early because medical school admissions look at your entire college record.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Any major, as long as you finish the science prerequisites and hold a high GPA. Take the medical college admission test in your third year.
- 3 Medical school** 4 years
Two years of science, two years of clinical rotations, ending in a doctor of medicine or doctor of osteopathic medicine degree. Ophthalmology applicants need strong scores and research to be competitive.
- 4 Internship year** 1 year
A general medicine or surgery year before the specialty begins. Paid, and required.
- 5 Ophthalmology residency** 3 years
Three years of eye training at a program accredited by ACGME (the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education). You will do hundreds of cataract operations before you finish.

Pros and cons

- + Surgery with fast, visible results: people see the next morning
- + Better hours than almost any other surgical specialty
- + Very high pay, especially if you own part of the practice
- Twelve years of training and a competitive match to get in
- Very large medical school debt
- Clinic volume is high and the pace can feel like a conveyor belt

Good to know

Three eye jobs, often confused

An ophthalmologist is a medical doctor who operates. An optometrist has a four-year doctor of optometry degree, tests eyes and treats many eye diseases without surgery. An optician fits and adjusts the g...

Cataract surgery is one of the most common operations in...

It takes about fifteen to twenty minutes, is usually done under local anesthetic with the patient awake, and is performed millions of times a year in the United States. Most eye surgeons will do several thousa...

Optional boosts

Retina. Glaucoma. Cornea and refractive surgery. Pediatric ophthalmology.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Ophthalmologists, Except Pediatric (29-1241.00)
American Academy of Ophthalmology
United States Medical Licensing Examination
Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education

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/ophthalmologist>



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