

Plastic Surgeon

Rebuild faces, hands and bodies after cancer, burns and accidents. Cosmetic work is only part of it.

TYPICAL PAY

\$559,030

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$215k to \$727k

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, burn units, private surgery centers, clin...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Top grades in biology, chemistry, physics and math. Nothing here is decisive, but weak science makes every later step harder.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Any major, as long as you finish the pre-medical science courses and keep a high GPA. Sit the MCAT (Medical College Admission Test) in your third year.
- 3 Medical school** 4 years
Two years of classroom science, then two years of hospital rotations. You graduate as an MD (Doctor of Medicine) or a DO (Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine). Both routes lead here.
- 4 Residency, one of two routes** 6 to 8 years
The integrated route is 6 years of combined training entered straight from medical school. The independent route is 5 years of general surgery first, then at least 3 more years of plastic surgery, all 3 at the same institution.
- 5 Board certification** After residency
A written examination and then an oral examination from the American Board of Plastic Surgery.

Pros and cons

- + You give people back a face, a hand or a body after something terrible
- + Among the best paid work in the country
- + The one surgical field where you can genuinely build your own business
- Fourteen to sixteen years and six figures of debt
- Matching into the residency is brutally competitive
- Malpractice exposure is high and cosmetic patients sue over appearance

Optional boosts

Hand surgery. Craniofacial surgery. Burn surgery. Microsurgery and breast reconstruction.

Good to know

There are two completely different ways in

The American Board of Plastic Surgery accepts an integrated route of 6 years entered straight from medical school, or an independent route where you first complete 5 progressive years of general surgery and...

The hand gets its own exam

Plastic surgery, orthopedic surgery and general surgery all lead to hand surgery, and the American Board of Plastic Surgery runs a separate hand surgery examination with its own date each year. The...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Pediatric Surgeons, the nearest published surgical wage line
American Board of Plastic Surgery: training requirements
American Society of Plastic Surgeons
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/plastic-surgeon>



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