

Rheumatologist

The doctor for joints and the immune system: arthritis, lupus, gout, vasculitis. Thirteen years of training, then a career of long puzzles.

TYPICAL PAY

\$236,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$66k to \$239k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

13 to 14 years

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Outpatient clinics, hospitals, infusion centers, academic medic...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
 Top grades in biology, chemistry and math. Medicine in this country is a numbers game long before it is a caring one, and your college admission is the first gate.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
 Any major, with the science prerequisites finished and a high GPA. Sit the MCAT (Medical College Admission Test), taken by about 95,000 people a year.
- 3 Medical school** 4 years
 Two years of science and two of clinical rotations, ending in an MD (Doctor of Medicine) or a DO (Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine). There are 174 medical schools in the country.
- 4 Internal medicine residency** 3 years
 Paid hospital training in adult medicine. You are matched to a program by a national algorithm rather than hired one by one.
- 5 Rheumatology fellowship** 2 years
 Two years learning autoimmune disease, joint examination, ultrasound and the drugs that suppress the immune system. Then the specialty board exam.

Pros and cons

- + Clinic-based, so very little night and weekend work compared to hospital specialties
- + You keep the same patients for decades and watch treatment work
- + The medicine is genuinely difficult and genuinely interesting
- Thirteen years of training and six figures of debt
- Pays less than the procedural specialties for the same years of training
- Most of these diseases are managed, not cured

Good to know

It is an immune system specialty, not a bone one

The American College of Rheumatology publishes treatment guidelines for rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, psoriatic arthritis, gout, vasculitis and juvenile arthritis. Almost all of those are the immune sy...

The wage survey refuses to name a top figure

For the physician group this job sits in, the federal survey publishes a median but stops counting at \$239,200 a year. Everything above is recorded only as at or above the cap, so any precise top number qu...

Optional boosts

Pediatric rheumatology. Musculoskeletal ultrasound. Clinical trials and research. Lupus and vasculitis centers.

Where these numbers come from

O*NET, the US Department of Labor occupation database: Physicians, All Other
 ABIM, the American Board of Internal Medicine
 American College of Rheumatology
 ACGME, which accredits residency and fellowship programs

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/rheumatologist>



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