

Sonographer

You run the ultrasound machine and are often the first person to see what is wrong. Two years of school for pay near six figures.

TYPICAL PAY

\$96,590

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$68k to \$129k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

2 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Hospitals, imaging centers, cardiology and vascular clinics, d...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Physics, biology and math. Some programs also want a health care course or documented hours in a clinic.
- 2 Get into an accredited program** Apply a year ahead
Look for accreditation from CAAHEP (the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs). Classes are small, applications outnumber seats badly, and many programs have a waiting list.
- 3 Associate degree, bachelor's degree or certificate** 1 to 4 years
Anatomy, ultrasound physics, cross sectional anatomy and scanning protocols, plus clinical rotations in a real imaging department from early on.
- 4 Pass your credential exams** Around graduation
The usual route is the physics exam plus one specialty exam from ARDMS (the American Registry for Diagnostic Medical Sonography), which makes you an RDMS (Registered Diagnostic Medical Sonographer).
- 5 Get hired and add specialties** Ongoing
Most people start general, then add vascular or cardiac over the next few years.

Pros and cons

- + Near six figure median pay for a two year degree
- + No radiation, so no lead apron and no dose limits
- + Real patient contact without the paperwork load of nursing
- Getting into a program is harder than passing it
- Shoulder, wrist and neck injuries are the occupational hazard of the job
- You often see the bad news first and are not allowed to tell the patient

Optional boosts

Vascular. Cardiac. Musculoskeletal. Pregnancy and fetal scanning.

Good to know

It started as submarine hunting

Ultrasound grew out of sonar, the technology built to find submarines by bouncing sound off them. The medical version does the same thing to organs, which is why the images look like a map of echoes rather t...

No radiation at all

X-ray, computed tomography and nuclear medicine all use ionizing radiation, so those staff wear badges that measure their dose. Sonographers use sound waves instead, so there is no lead apron, no...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Diagnostic Medical Sonographers (29-2032.00)

O*NET OnLine: Diagnostic Medical Sonographers

American Registry for Diagnostic Medical Sonography, at Inteleos

Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education 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/sonographer>



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