

Surgical Technologist

Set up the operating room, guard the sterile field and hand the surgeon the right instrument before they ask. Two years of school.

TYPICAL PAY

\$64,650

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$46k to \$97k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 2 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Hospital operating rooms, outpatient surgery centers, denta...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma or an equivalency certificate** Grade 12
Biology, chemistry and any health science class. Steady hands and a strong stomach matter more than top grades.
- 2 Accredited surgical technology program** 9 months to 2 years
A community college associate degree or a technical school certificate. Coursework covers anatomy, microbiology, physiology, patient safety, sterilization and infection control.
- 3 Clinical rotations** Inside the program
Supervised time in real operating rooms, scrubbing in on real cases. This is the part that decides whether the job is for you.
- 4 Pass the national certification exam** After graduation
Graduating from an accredited program makes you eligible for the exam that grants the CST (Certified Surgical Technologist) credential.
- 5 First job and CPR certification** Immediately
Most hospital jobs also require current CPR or basic life support certification, which your program or employer arranges.

Pros and cons

- + Full time hospital job with benefits after two years of school
- + Federal projections show faster than average growth
- + You are part of the team that actually fixes people
- Long hours standing completely still in one spot
- Nights, weekends and being on call
- You will see and smell things that are hard to forget

Good to know

Counting is a legal safeguard

Sponges, needles and instruments are counted out loud before, during and after every operation. The count is documented, and if it does not match, nobody closes until an X-ray settles it.

The profession has its own national body

The Association of Surgical Technologists was founded in 1969 and says it serves more than 60,000 members and represents more than 80,000 practitioners nationwide.

Optional boosts

Cardiac, transplant or trauma teams. Surgical first assistant. Robotic surgery. Central sterile processing lead.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Surgical Technologists
Bureau of Labor Statistics: Surgical Assistants and Technologists
National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting: exam eligibility
Association of Surgical Technologists

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/surgical-technologist>



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