

What to expect from a degree in Surgical Technology



Choosing a career shouldn't be brain surgery (okay, sometimes it's brain surgery)

What Does a Surgical Technologist Do?

Learn About the Salary, Required Skills, & More

BY [DAWN ROSENBERG MCKAY](#)

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A surgical technologist assists surgeons, anesthesiologists, registered nurses, and other members of an operating room team. Surgical technologists, who may also be called surgical or operating room technicians or scrub techs, prepare the operating room before the surgery takes place. They also prepare patients for their surgery, arrange medical equipment, and assist doctors during surgical procedures.

The surgical technologist position is sometimes confused with the surgical assistant role. A surgical assistant is another member of the operating room team. While a surgical technologist's tasks are usually limited to preparing operating rooms and equipment, and handing instruments to surgeons, the surgical assistant provides hands-on assistance to a surgeon during an operation.

A surgical assistant might help control a patient's bleeding, apply sutures and use suctioning equipment. Some surgical technologists become surgical assistants after receiving supplemental on-the-job training. To become a surgical assistant, you can also complete a formal training program.

Surgical Technologist Duties & Responsibilities

As part of a day's regular duties and tasks, surgical technicians may perform some or all of the following:

- Prepare the operating room for upcoming surgeries
- Sterilize equipment and stock up any necessary supplies
- Prepare patients for their procedures
- Sterilize equipment and hands surgeons instruments upon their request.
- Order and take inventory of supplies, and maintain files and records of procedures

Surgical Technologist Salary

A surgical technologist's salary varies based on the area of expertise, level of experience, education, certifications, and other factors.

- Median Annual Salary: \$47,300 (\$22.74 /hour)
- Top 10% Annual Salary: More than \$69,170 (\$33.25/hour)
- Bottom 10% Annual Salary: Less than \$32,870 (\$15.8/hour)

[Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018](#)

Education, Training & Certification

To work in this field, you must complete certain educational requirements and an optional certification:

- **Education:** You'll need an associate degree in surgical technology. Programs consist of a combination of classroom education and clinical training. The [Association of Surgical Technologists \(AST\)](#), a widely recognized professional association, believes the associate degree is the preferred level of entry into the profession.
- **Certification:** You can become certified as a surgical technologist by first completing an educational program and then passing an exam. The National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting (NBSTSA) and the National Center for Competency Testing (NCCT) both offer certification. The NBSTA requires completion of a surgical technology program that has been accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP). You can search for an accredited surgical technology program on the CAAHEP website (CAAHEP Accredited Program Search). The NCCT requires that one completes a program approved by that organization. Few states have laws regulating this occupation, but the Association of Surgical Technologists has been lobbying for licensure of surgical technologists.

Surgical Technologist Skills & Competencies

In addition to the hard skills you will acquire through formal training, you will also need the following soft skills to succeed in this field:

- **Active Listening:** This ability allows you to understand instructions from surgeons and other members of the operating room team.
- **Attention to Detail:** You need the capacity to notice even the smallest details, and you must be attentive to your work, often for extended periods of time.
- **Coordination:** You must be able to collaborate with other members of your team.
- **Problem Solving:** You will need to be able to identify and solve problems.

- **Critical Thinking:** You must be able to weigh your options and choose the best one when you are trying to solve a problem or make a decision.
- **Stress management and physical stamina:** You should be able to stand for long periods of time and be able to provide a high level of care, even when under pressure.

Job Outlook

The job outlook for this occupation is excellent. Employment is expected to grow much faster than the average for all occupations through 2026. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) classifies it a "Bright Outlook" occupation.

According to the BLS, employment for surgical technologists is expected to grow by 12% over the next decade relative to other occupations. The growth is driven by technological developments that are increasing the number of surgeries performed, as well as aging baby boomers in need of surgeries. This growth rate compares to the projected 7% average growth for all occupations between 2016 and 2026.

Work Environment

Most jobs were in hospitals, but some were in outpatient surgery centers. Many people might find the operating room to be an unpleasant place. You could be exposed to communicable diseases and objectionable sights and smells there.

Work Schedule

It is a physically demanding job. Expect to spend long hours on your feet. You will have to move patients and equipment. Your work hours could include nights, weekends and holidays. Shifts often last longer than eight hours

<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-is-a-surgical-technologist-526071>

8 Sure-Fire Skills You Need to Succeed as a Surgical Technologist



The job of a surgical tech is crucial in the operating room. Without proper knowledge and skills, not only can it cause confusion and added stress during surgery, it also puts the patient at risk. Although you can achieve the required book knowledge through a university-based surgical technology program, there are some skills that cannot be taught.

1. Ability to Work in Groups

During surgery you will have to work alongside several other members of the medical staff. Your ability to work with them in close proximity, listen, and follow instructions is vital to the success of the surgery. The procedure is dependent on each person's ability to work efficiently and effectively as a team.

2. Possess a Calm Nature

Needless to say, the operating room is a high-stress environment. You will likely have to deal with tension, an urgency to accomplish procedures, and unsettling scenes. This is all part of the job and you must be ready for anything. However, don't let that scare you off. There are certainly many benefits to being a surgery tech as well; such as seeing a patient recover from a near-fatal injury.

3. Excellent Communication Skills

Your ability to communicate effectively and clearly is very important when dealing with the surgeon, as well as your colleagues. You must be able to state your needs and requests in a manner in which others will understand. There isn't a lot of time in the operating room for questions. Your ability to comprehend others' speech is equally important. One misunderstanding or misinterpretation in the operating room can have dire consequences.

4. Exceptional Dexterity

Do you remember the game "Operation" and how difficult it was to pull the pieces out without touching the edge? The same dexterity and hand steadiness needed in that game, is exactly what is required in a real-life operating room. During surgery, you must be able to remain shake-free and maintain absolute concentration. As a surgery technician, this skill is critical.

5. Not Squeamish

Obviously, inside the operating room you are going to see some very graphic scenes, unlike what you've ever witnessed before. Although fascinating and amazing to watch, it is important that you are able to handle such situations without becoming nauseated or even worse, faint. Your ability to stay in control and remain focused is crucial during surgery.

6. Expect the Unexpected

There aren't too many jobs where you can say that two days are never the same, but that is not the case for a surgery technician. Every day comes with its own challenges and new scenarios. This is why it is important to be able to think on your feet. Situations can change in the blink of an eye and you need to be ready to make the proper adjustments. There may be instances when there isn't time for anyone to tell you what to do. Therefore, you must be able to fully understand the situation at hand and perform the appropriate tasks without instruction.

7. Willingness to Learn

You must be teachable. There will always be someone who is more skilled and has had more experience than you. They can teach you crucial skills that you may not be able to learn elsewhere. Therefore, keep your mind open to suggestions, requests and ideas. Then, you too will be able to teach others.

8. Be Dedicated and Reliable

In order to succeed, it is important that you are dedicated to your job and to those you work with. When you enjoy your position and support the organization you work for, it is easy to deliver high quality service. The patients, as well as the staff depend on this. They need you to be dedicated and passionate about your job. Additionally, you must be reliable. Each team member possesses unique skills that the other members rely on. They will depend on you to help ensure that the operation goes smoothly.

<https://www.ecpi.edu/blog/8-sure-skills-you-need-succeed-surgical-tech>

6 Enticing Reasons Why Becoming a Surgical Technologist Is Worth It

By [Jess Scherman](#) on 04/27/2020



You've decided you're done dodging questions from family and friends about your dead-end job. You're ready for something better; something to launch your career and allow you to make a difference. You're interested in making a name for yourself in the healthcare industry—and becoming a surgical technologist sounds like it might be the perfect fit.

Surgical technologists go by many titles: Surgical tech, operating room technician, scrub tech or surgical assistant. But regardless of what you call them, they all play an integral role on the operating room team.

But what do surgical technologists do exactly? And more importantly, is becoming a surgical tech worth your time and energy? Keep reading to learn some facts that may help you answer your questions.

What does a surgical tech do?

You have a vague understanding of what a surgical technologist position involves, but let's take a closer look at the details. Just as the jobs titles vary, a surgical tech's responsibilities cover a wide range of duties. Their responsibilities include tasks to prep for surgery, tasks during the surgery and post-surgery tasks.

It is typically the surgical tech's job to prepare both the patient and the operating room for surgeries. This includes sterilizing the equipment and ensuring there are adequate supplies in the operating room before the surgeon begins. They also help prep the patients by cleansing and disinfecting any incision areas.

During the surgery, surgical techs assist the surgeons by handing them instruments at their request. They may help by holding organs in place or using retractors during the surgery. Once the procedure is completed, they are responsible for helping dress the wound and transferring patients into recovery rooms.

About 73 percent of surgical techs worked in hospitals in 2020, [according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (BLS).¹ Other possible work environments include outpatient centers or the offices of physicians who perform outpatient surgery.

Now that you have a better understanding of the typical roles and responsibilities of surgical techs, you're ready to get to the good stuff: What's in it for you?

6 Reasons to consider becoming a surgical tech

How long does it take to become a surgical tech? What does the future look like for the field? And how much does a surgical tech make? These are all logical questions to ask when contemplating this career.

You'll find all those answers and more below. Here are six compelling reasons to consider a career as a surgical technologist:

1. You can enter the field quickly

Many healthcare careers require several years of schooling before being qualified to start working. Fortunately, this isn't the case for surgical techs. Most employers require a postsecondary Certificate or Associate's degree to work in this position.

Surgical tech programs vary in length, but most have their students trained and graduated in two years or fewer.² This means you could be scrubbing in for your first surgery in just a couple of years.

2. Job opportunities are on the rise

Stagnant or declining employment opportunities aren't something you'll have to worry about with a surgical technologist career. The [BLS projects](#) employment in this field to grow at the faster-than-average rate of 12 percent through 2026.¹

But what's the reason behind the growth? Surgical procedures are being performed more frequently than ever as a result of the advancements in surgical technology. The BLS also attributes this growth to the aging baby boomer generation. This population is expected to require more attention from healthcare professionals in coming years, resulting in an uptick in surgical procedures.

3. You'll have above-average earning potential

Less time in school generally equates to less money spent on courses. This is an obvious advantage for aspiring surgical techs, but the financial benefits don't end there.

The typical surgical tech salary is another bright spot. The [BLS reports](#) that the 2021 median annual salary for surgical technologists was \$48,350.¹ This number sits just above the average for all occupations, which was \$45,760.

4. Employment opportunities exist in all geographic areas

You've already learned that a majority of surgical techs are employed in hospitals. Hospitals are located in virtually every area across the country, and every hospital has surgeons who perform procedures with the help of surgical techs. This means there are employment opportunities country-wide.

This means you won't have to relocate to a specific region just to find a job. Whether you want to work in a big city or a rural area, on the east coast, the west coast or anywhere in between, you'll have employment opportunities available as a surgical tech.

5. You won't get bored

If you're the type of person who gets jaded sitting at a desk and performing the same tasks day after day, you'll be relieved to hear that is a far cry from reality for a surgical technologist. This position will keep you on-the-move all day long.

No two days are the same for a surgical tech, either. Even for those who specialize in assisting for the same type of surgery, each patient and procedure will vary from the next. Surgeries do not always go by the book, which means you'll need to stay on your toes and be prepared for whatever happens. These high-pressure scenarios make for an exciting career.

6. You'll make a difference every day

Earning a decent paycheck is important, but you also want to make a difference when you clock into work each day. Lucky for you, a surgical tech career comes with a high level of satisfaction and higher meaning. How fulfilling is it to know you're helping improve patients' lives during each and every shift?

"Becoming a surgical tech is a great career choice. When you leave work every day, you know you have made a difference in someone's life," says Nicole Rescorla, CST, surgical technologist at the [Cancer Treatment Centers of America](#).

Ready to reap the rewards of becoming a surgical tech?

So, is becoming a surgical tech worth it? The choice is ultimately yours. But if you're looking for an exciting and rewarding way to fill a gap in the healthcare field, this could be the career you've been seeking.

If becoming a surgical tech interests you, it's time to learn more about the path ahead. Check out our article, "[Surgical Tech Training: What to Expect on the Road to the OR](#)."

¹*Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, [accessed June 2022]. Salary ranges represent national, averaged earnings for the occupations listed and include workers at all levels of education and experience. Ranges do not represent starting salaries and employment conditions in your area may vary.*

²*Time to completion is dependent on the number of transfer credits accepted and courses completed each term.*

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was originally published in September 2014. It has since been updated to include information relevant to 2022.

<https://www.rasmussen.edu/degrees/health-sciences/blog/becoming-a-surgical-tech-is-worth-it/>

5 Unique Surgical Tech Skills You Need to Succeed

By [Kristina Ericksen](#) on 08/08/2018

The future looks bright for surgical technologists.

The number of surgical technologists is projected to increase 12 percent through 2026, which is faster than the seven percent growth projected for all occupations, according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). Not only that, but also the [median wage for surgical techs](#) in 2017 was \$46,310 as compared to the \$37,040 median wage for all occupations.* If that doesn't catch your interest; the fact it doesn't require a Bachelor's degree should.

While you may be eager to launch your surgical tech career, it's important to know whether you have what it takes beforehand. Because they play such a unique, hands-on role in the operating room, it is critical that surgical techs understand the less-common skills that are needed to become successful in the field. The usual descriptors like "hard-worker" and "dedicated" are all great to have, but these five skills identified by surgical techs will help you stand out.

Surgical tech skill #1: A strong stomach

Any hands-on healthcare job has unpleasant to downright disgusting moments, but as a surgical tech, you will be smack-dab in the presence of more exposed innards than you'd probably care to share. It's important that you keep your cool and don't get woozy in the middle of an operation if things get messy.

After all, there will be quite a bit of blood—and smells—in the operating room, says Rasmussen College Program Coordinator Chante Yearby. It might not come easy for everyone, but the initial shock of surgical sights and smells does eventually get easier to deal with.

Surgical tech skill #2: Attentiveness and anticipation

"A good surgical tech anticipates the needs of the operation, whether it is related to surgical hardware or suture," says neurosurgeon [Abhishiek Sharma](#), MD. "A great surgical tech has not only a basic knowledge of instruments and equipment, but also he or she is actively engaged in the operation."

It is essential for you to remain calm and focus on your duties, no matter how simple or complex a procedure may be. An alert and attentive surgical tech can make all the difference in the operating room, assisting surgeons and nurses and actively anticipating anything to come.

Surgical tech skill #3: Thick skin

Thick skin is always important when your job involves handling sharp objects regularly. But seriously, mistakes happen and with that, you can expect to receive some strongly worded criticism from the operating surgeon. You need to be able to take criticism without getting flustered and learn from your mistakes. It may seem like a tongue-lashing for a small mistake is harsh, but a mistake in surgery can be the difference between life and death.

Yearby says that because of this, it is a necessity for surgical techs to be even-tempered and not prone to overreaction. You might not agree with the criticism or the tone, but losing your cool will not make it better.

Surgical tech skill #4: Team-oriented mindset

“A successful surgery takes a team. Teamwork is a great quality to have anywhere, but it’s mandatory for surgical techs,” says Rasmussen College program coordinator Sally Vance.

Your job is to have everything in the OR prepared, so you need to be team-oriented in order for everything to go as smoothly as possible for everyone involved. You need to pay close attention to the surgeon and be absolutely sure of your actions in the operating room in order to ensure patient safety.

“A good surgical tech almost becomes an extension of the surgeon,” says Sharma.

Surgical tech skill #5: Adaptability

“Operating rooms can change on a dime,” says Yearby. “Cases can be added or canceled at the last minute. The surgeon could be running late. Procedures may not go as planned.”

Everyone in the operating room would love for each procedure to be a perfectly orchestrated series of snips and slices followed by some tidy stitching. Unfortunately, reality tends to get in the way—things can go wrong and unexpected issues can come up. When this happens, you need to be able to think on your feet and keep calm, no matter how intense the situation can be. The unexpected is inevitable in the operating room, and the key is to quickly get yourself a step ahead.

Do you have what it takes?

Even if all of these qualifiers don't quite match you yet, the good news is that these skills can all be improved with practice and experience—even developing a strong stomach. You will see and experience some truly amazing things as a surgical tech and have the opportunity to help save lives on a regular basis. That's what makes all the blood, guts and pressure worthwhile.

*Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook [career information accessed August 5, 2018.] Salary data represents national, averaged earnings for the occupations listed and includes workers at all levels of education and experience. This data does not represent starting salaries and employment conditions in your area may vary.

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<https://www.rasmussen.edu/degrees/health-sciences/blog/5-unique-surgical-tech-skills/>

4 Essential Traits for the Aspiring Surgical Technologist

Being an Aspiring Surgical Technologist

In addition to Surgical Technology Training, an aspiring surgical technologist must be equipped with a variety of skills in order to succeed. Check out these 4 essential traits for surgical techs.

Remain Calm Under Pressure

Oftentimes, as a surgical technologist, you will be placed in emergency situations where a person's life is in your hands. You may be faced with the need to tackle and complete medical procedures with immediacy under harsh or gruesome circumstances. It is imperative to remain composed during these times in order to accomplish the task at hand. A singled stressed-out employee can affect the entire flow of the operating room.

Attention to Detail

As a surgical technologist, it is your responsibility to be prepared and to ensure that the operation runs smoothly. One of your responsibilities may be to prep the operating room for surgery. It is vital that you sterilize and have any necessary equipment ready for use. Additionally, you must pay close attention to instructions given to you by the surgeon, and be entirely sure of every action you take. Act with care in the operating room because ultimately, the patient is someone's family, so treat them as your own.

Good Communication Skills

Similar to most occupations, communication is the key to success. You will need to communicate not only with coworkers, but also with patients and their families. You may need to be the reassuring voice that a family needs to hear

in order to remain calm during a patient's surgery. Likewise, you will need good communication skills in a group setting. In and out of the operating room, it is crucial to work together to ensure that surgical complications are avoided. The only way for the operating room to run smoothly and efficiently is to work together. Be open to suggestion and instruction. Surgeons and fellow coworkers are looking out the patient's best interest. Be teachable and willing to take constructive criticism.

Physical Stamina

Lastly, one of the most important skills of a surgical technologist is physical stamina. You are often required to work long shifts and be on call for emergency situations. On top of long shifts, surgery can last for several hours requiring you to be on your feet for an extended period of time. Invest in a comfy pair of shoes...because you're going to need them!

<https://mkecc.edu/news-events/blog/4-essential-traits-surgical-technologist/>

Neurosurgeon Reveals What Makes a Good Surg Tech

Posted by [Marc Costanzo](#) on Thursday, May. 12, 2016

No one interacts with surgical technologists firsthand quite like surgeons do. So what better way to get an inside peek at life as a surg tech than to speak with a prominent surgeon?

I recently spoke with Dr. Bill Thorell, MD, Director of Cerebrovascular Neurosurgery for Nebraska Medicine, to find out what he looks for in a surgical technologist. Dr. Thorell speaks to Nebraska Methodist College surg tech students every year, and his presentation is eye-opening to those who are about to embark on their own careers in the operating room.

If you're at all interested in the field of surgical technology, then you'll definitely want to hear his thoughts on what makes a good surg tech.

Technical Knowhow Is Only The Beginning

Before I interviewed Dr. Thorell, I assumed he would talk to me about the different techniques that surgical technologists use to succeed or how they must keep up to date with changes in the industry and advances in instrumentation.

While Dr. Thorell acknowledged that such subjects are certainly important, he stressed that things like knowing the instruments are really only the beginning of a surgical technologist's education. The best surg techs let their technical expertise act as a baseline for their skills in the surgical theatre.

Surg techs sometimes have to act as de facto translators. They may know the exact name of an instrument, but in the heat of an intense procedure, a surgeon might only describe what the instrument does or even call it a "thingamajig."

It's up to the surg tech to recognize precisely what the surgeon wants, that when he or she points to the "whatchamacallit," they'll know to reach for the trocar rather than waste precious time questioning what they're supposed to be attaining. Without picking up on those cues, the surgeon will have to spend time clearing things up. The surg tech who is able to cut out that step becomes a valuable asset

Recognizing Differences

Not only are no two cases alike, but no two surgeons are alike either. As a result, fairly similar procedures could be conducted using different techniques depending on the surgeon taking the lead.

As Dr. Thorell puts it, every surgeon has his or her idiosyncrasies. It's up to surg techs to recognize each surgeon's strengths and anticipate ways to make the process as smooth as possible. Dr. Thorell acknowledges that while he might prefer it when a surg tech prepares the instruments in a certain way or facilitates procedures using one technique, another surgeon may prefer things the opposite.

A good surg tech, therefore, picks up on the subtle nuances of each surgeon they work with. They'll understand what's expected in each case and be able to react accordingly. It takes time to develop this rapport, but when it comes, it can make the surgical process that much more successful.

Emotional Intuition

In surgery, there's a time and place for everything. During lengthy procedures, the surgical team might be sufficiently at ease to have conversations that are fairly light in tone. It might not even be inappropriate to talk about pop culture or tell a joke.

Dr. Thorell notes, however, that one of the most important skills to learn is how to read the emotions of the people in the room. When an operation takes a turn that no one was expecting, things can get tense quickly, and the topic of the local sports team is no longer acceptable now that everyone is focused on saving a life. You need to react swiftly and adjust your technique accordingly when the tone shifts.

This kind of intuition doesn't always come easily. It may take months or years of working with a team to recognize when each individual is stressed or how to interact with them in a way that doesn't contribute to an already precarious situation. But Dr. Thorell stressed that picking up on such verbal or non-verbal cues can be critical for success.

He also acknowledges that a great surg tech has to prepare himself or herself mentally and emotionally for the experience. You're going to have bad days, but Dr. Thorell says that surg techs must be able to let that go and move from one case to the next. You can't let what happened yesterday or even what happened an hour ago affect right now.

It takes a special kind of person to handle those complex emotions, but the best surg techs do so fantastically.

Don't Devalue Knowledge

Dr. Thorell describes surg techs as knowledge-based healthcare workers. When I ask him to explain, he says that they have a certain level of knowledge that surgeons depend on. It's a different skillset than surgeons, but it is certainly a skillset, and an important one at that.

Surgeons are relying on the people around them to do their part. Dr. Thorell encourages surg techs to own their knowledge, saying he worries that they might undervalue the skills they bring to the table. He asks that surg techs not just assume the surgeon will know something. When a surg tech is confident in their own knowledge, they'll be able to provide a valuable resource to the surgeon conducting the operation.

A Better Patient Experience

Surgical technologists are critical for producing positive outcomes for patients. When a surg tech has technical knowledge and then is able to combine that with the traits described by Dr. Thorell, he or she is able to thrive in an environment that can be stressful yet also highly rewarding.

Dr. Thorell acknowledges how grateful he himself is when he can rely on a surg tech during an operation. He respects the unique qualifications they have and what they're able to contribute, and he continues to encourage students at Nebraska Methodist College and elsewhere to have faith in themselves and their ability to make a difference during an operation.

<https://blog.methodistcollege.edu/neurosurgeon-reveals-what-makes-a-good-surg-tech>