



Surgical Technologist

Surgical Technologists, also called *operating room technicians*, assist in surgical operations. They prepare operating rooms, arrange equipment, and help doctors during surgeries.

DUTIES

Surgical technologists typically do the following:

- Prepare operating rooms for surgery
- Sterilize equipment and make sure that there are adequate supplies for surgery
- Ready patients for surgery, such as by washing and disinfecting incision sites
- Help surgeons during surgery by passing them instruments and other sterile supplies
- Count supplies, such as sponges and instruments
- Maintain a sterile environment

Surgical technologists work as members of a healthcare team alongside [physicians and surgeons](#), [registered nurses](#), and other healthcare workers.

Before an operation, surgical technologists prepare the operating room by setting up surgical instruments and equipment. They also prepare patients for surgery by washing and disinfecting incision sites, positioning the patients on the operating table, covering them with sterile drapes, and taking them to and from the operating room. Surgical technologists prepare sterile solutions and medications used in surgery and check that all surgical equipment is working properly. They help the surgical team put on sterile gowns and gloves.

During an operation, surgical technologists pass instruments and supplies to surgeons and first assistants. They also hold retractors, hold internal organs in place during the procedure, or set up robotic surgical equipment. Technologists also may handle specimens taken for laboratory analysis. Once the operation is complete, surgical technologists may apply bandages and other dressings to the incision site. They may also help transfer patients to recovery rooms and restock operating rooms after a procedure.

Surgical first assistants have a hands-on role, directly assisting surgeons during a procedure. For instance, they may help to suction the incision site or suture a wound.

IMPORTANT QUALITIES

- **Detail oriented.** Surgical technologists must pay close attention to their work at all times. For example, they need to provide the correct sterile equipment for surgeons during an operation.
- **Dexterity.** Surgical technologists should be comfortable working with their hands. They must be able to provide needed equipment quickly.
- **Integrity.** Because they are trusted to provide sterile supplies and quality patient care during surgical procedures, surgical technologists must have integrity.
- **Physical stamina.** Surgical technologists should be comfortable standing for extended periods.
- **Stress-management skills.** Working in an operating room can be stressful. Surgical technologists should be able to work well under pressure while providing a high level of care.

EDUCATION

Surgical technologists typically need postsecondary education. Many community colleges and vocational schools, as well as some universities and hospitals, have accredited programs in surgical technology.

Programs range in length from several months to 2 years, and they grant a diploma, certificate, or **associate's degree** upon completion. Admission typically requires a high school diploma or the equivalent.

Surgical technology education includes courses in anatomy, biology, medical terminology, pharmacology, and other topics. Surgical technologists are trained in the care and safety of patients, sterilization techniques, how to set up technical or robotic equipment, and preventing and controlling infections. In addition to classroom study, students also work in supervised clinical settings to gain hands-on experience.

First surgical assistants may complete a formal education program in surgical assisting. Others may work as a surgical technologist and receive additional on-the-job training before becoming a first assistant.

Accredited Schools in Virginia – Community College

- Lord Fairfax Community College – Middletown, VA
- Northern Virginia Community College – Annandale, VA
- Piedmont Community College – Charlottesville, VA

Accredited Schools in Virginia – Private

- National College – Salem, VA
- Miller-Motte Technical College – Lynchburg, VA
- ECPI College of Technology – Virginia Beach, VA
- Fortis College – Richmond, VA
- Richmond School of Health and Technology – Richmond, VA

Licenses, Certifications, and Registrations

Certification can be beneficial in finding a job. Surgical technologists may earn certification through credentialing organizations.

Certification through [The National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting](#) allows the use of the title “Certified Surgical Technologist (CST).” Certification typically requires completing an accredited formal education program or military training program and passing an exam.

Certification through the [National Center for Competency Testing](#) allows the use of the title “Tech in Surgery - Certified (NCCT).” Applicants may qualify through formal education, military training, work experience, or other eligibility paths. All require documenting critical skills and passing an exam. Both certifications require surgical technologists to complete continuing education to maintain their certification. In addition, many jobs require technologists to become certified in CPR or basic life support, or both.

A small number of states have regulations governing the work of surgical technologists or surgical assistants, or both.

[The National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting](#), the [National Commission for the Certification of Surgical Assistants](#), and the [American Board of Surgical Assistants](#) offer certification for surgical first assistants.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Surgical technologists held about 99,800 jobs in 2014. About 70 percent of surgical technologists worked in hospitals in 2014. Some work in outpatient care centers or in offices of physicians who perform outpatient surgery.

Surgical technologists wear scrubs (special sterile clothing) while they are in the operating room. Their work may be physically demanding, requiring them to be on their feet for long periods.

Surgical technologists also may need to help move patients or lift heavy trays of medical supplies. At times, they may be exposed to communicable diseases and unpleasant sights, odors, and materials.

Work Schedules

Most surgical technologists work full time. Surgical technologists employed in hospitals may work or be on call during nights, weekends, and holidays. They may also be required to work shifts lasting longer than 8 hours.

JOB OUTLOOK

Employment of surgical technologists is projected to grow 15 percent from 2014 to 2024, much faster than the average for all occupations. Several factors will lead to demand for surgical technologists.

Advances in medical technology have made surgery safer, and more operations are being done to treat a variety of illnesses and injuries. In addition, the number of individuals who have access to health insurance is expected to continue to increase because of federal health insurance reform, which should in turn lead to increased demand for surgical services.

The aging of the large baby-boom generation also is expected to increase the need for surgical technologists, because older people usually require more operations. Moreover, as these individuals age, they may be more willing than those in previous generations to seek medical treatment to improve their quality of life. For example, an individual may decide to have a knee replacement operation in order to maintain an active lifestyle.

Job prospects will be best for surgical technologists who have completed an accredited education program and hold a certification.

AVERAGE SALARY

The median annual wage for surgical technologists was \$43,350 in May 2014. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$30,780, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$62,170.

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Contacts for More Information

For more information about surgical technologists, visit [Association of Surgical Technologists](#)

For information about certification, visit [The National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting](#)
[National Center for Competency Testing](#)
[National Commission for the Certification of Surgical Assistants](#)
[American Board of Surgical Assistants](#)

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[Surgical Technologists](#)

REFERENCE

- Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2016-17 Edition*, Surgical Technologists, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/surgical-technologists.htm> (visited March 02, 2016).
- Explore Health Careers.org http://explorehealthcareers.org/en/Career/35/Surgical_Technologist