



American Medical Women's Association
The Vision and Voice of Women in Medicine since 1915

Choosing A Specialty

From the day you are accepted to medical school, people will ask you what kind of doctor you want to be. It's fine not to know what specialty you will choose early in your career. Many of the people who seem committed to a specialty in the beginning end up changing after they have had more exposure to the field. Most students find their niche by the end of their third year, after they have the chance to gain experience in various fields. Women are represented in all of the medical specialties and non-traditional medical careers; however, they are not distributed evenly across these. For example, in 1997, women made up only 6.9% of orthopedic surgery residents, but 62.6% of obstetrics and gynecology residents. A mentor or shadowing can assist you in making your decision regarding your specialty.

No matter which medical specialty or career you choose, you will reach your goals with perseverance and hard work. Women are forging into areas of medicine that have been exclusively held by men in the past. These pioneers are making it easier for other women to follow behind by demanding equality. In addition, some physicians choose to practice medicine in the traditional way that most of us envision when we think of doctors. Others use their medical training to work in research, administration, government, medical education and other fields. They may also choose to work for pharmaceutical companies, public clinics or as medical consultants.

Medicine is diverse. There are many different specialties, and within each specialty there are sub-specialties that have an even more specific focus. Here is a sampling of medical specialties:

- [Anesthesiology](#) - focuses on the relief of pain and administration of medication to relieve pain during surgery
- [Cardiology](#) - specializes in diagnosis and non-surgical treatment of disorders of the heart
- [Dermatology](#) - specializes in disorders of the skin
- [Emergency Medicine](#) - diagnosis and treatment of sudden illness and traumatic injury
- [Endocrinology](#) - focuses on problems with substances called hormones, that are made in particular areas of the body but act on other areas
- [Family Practice](#) - primary care doctors who diagnose and treat common problems in children and adults
- [Gastroenterology](#) - diagnosis and treatment of problems of the gastrointestinal system, including the stomach, small intestine, large intestine, gall bladder, and bile duct
- [Genetics](#) - focuses on diagnosis of inherited (genetic) disorders
- [Gerontology/Geriatrics](#) - specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of ailments of senior citizens
- [Hematology](#) - specializes in blood forming organs and disorders
- [Immunology](#) - specializes in the reaction of the immune system
- [Infectious Disease](#) - specializes in diseases caused by infectious agents
- [Internal Medicine](#) - specializes in the primary care of adults
- [Nephrology](#) - specializes in kidney disorders
- [Neurology](#) - specializes in diagnosis and non-surgical treatment of problems of the nervous system, including the brain, spinal cord, and nerves
- [Neurosurgery](#) - specializes in the surgical treatment of disorders of the nervous system
- [Obstetrics/Gynecology](#) - specializes in the female reproductive system and delivery of babies
- [Oncology](#) - specializes in the non-surgical treatment of people with cancer
- [Ophthalmology](#) - specializes in the surgical and non-surgical treatment of eye diseases and disorders
- [Orthopedic Surgery](#) - specializes in the surgical treatment of disorders or fractures of the skeletal system
- [Otolaryngology](#) - Commonly called "ear, nose, and throat" doctor (or ENT for short)

- [Pathology](#) - studies the causes of disease and death
- [Pediatrics](#) - primary care doctors specifically for children
- [Plastic Surgery](#) - surgeons who treat malformations or injuries that affect the appearance of an individual
- [Psychiatry](#) - specializes in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of mental disorders and substance abuse
- [Public Health/Preventive Medicine](#) - specializes in disease prevention and health promotion at the population/community level
- [Radiology](#) - specializes in techniques (such as x-ray and MRI, etc.) that allow the visualization of structures inside the body
- [Surgery](#) - specializes in surgical procedures
- [Urology](#) - specializes in the care of the male and female urinary tract and the male genital tract