

What is the American Board of Surgery?

The American Board of Surgery (ABS) was founded in 1937 through a joint effort of the American Surgical Association, American Medical Association and the American College of Surgeons, as well as regional surgical societies. These organizations recognized the need for a board that would evaluate, examine and certify individuals who meet a standard of excellence in the field of surgery. Additionally, the ABS was charged with improving and broadening opportunities for the education and training of surgeons.

The American Board of Surgery is an independent, non-profit organization with worldwide recognition. Its directors are distinguished surgeons in education, research and practice, and represent the principal surgical organizations in the United States. The ABS is one of the 24 certifying boards that are members of the American Board of Medical Specialties.

To find out if a surgeon is board certified, contact the ABS at the address below.



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Your Surgeon is Certified by the American Board of Surgery

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A surgeon certified in general surgery by the American Board of Surgery has training, knowledge and experience related to the diagnosis and comprehensive management of surgical conditions in the areas listed below. This includes preoperative, operative, and post-operative care, as well as the treatment of complications in these areas.

General surgeons are also trained in minimally invasive (laparoscopic) surgery, ultrasonography and endoscopy —surgical techniques that employ videoscopic instruments to examine or treat internal organs, and which are commonly used in surgical management.

Areas in which general surgeons are trained to provide care:

- **Digestive tract** – esophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine, rectum and anus
- **Abdomen** – stomach, diaphragm, biliary tract, liver, pancreas, spleen, and all types of hernias
- **Breast** – all types of benign and malignant disease
- **Skin and underlying tissues** – all types of benign and malignant disease
- **Endocrine system** – thyroid and parathyroid glands, pancreas and adrenal glands
- **Head and neck surgery** – endocrine, benign and malignant disorders, birth defects
- **Pediatric surgery** – surgical care of children, including newborns
- **Surgical critical care** – care of critically ill patients with surgical conditions requiring intensive care
- **Surgical oncology** – surgical management of cancer treatment and coordination of all aspects of cancer care
- **Transplantation** – including liver, kidney, pancreas and small bowel
- **Trauma and burns** – all phases of care for the injured or burned patient from the emergency department to rehabilitation, including intensive care
- **Vascular surgery** – vascular surgery emergencies, vascular access surgery for kidney dialysis patients, and other procedures involving arteries and veins

General surgeons frequently obtain additional training and may develop expertise in related areas, such as bariatric (weight loss) surgery, minimally invasive surgery, or end-of-life care, among others.

What is Board Certification?

Not all surgeons are board certified. To be certified by the American Board of Surgery means that a surgeon has met the highest standards of education, training and knowledge in the field of surgery.

Board certification is voluntary and demonstrates a surgeon's commitment to quality patient care. In contrast, medical licensure is required by state law for an individual to practice medicine and is not specialty specific.

What are the Requirements for Board Certification?

Board certification is intended to assess the qualifications of individuals who have completed extensive education and training in surgery, including the following stages:

1. Education

- Candidates for certification must have graduated from an accredited medical school in the U.S. or Canada, or be certified by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates.
- Candidates must also have completed five years of training in a general surgery residency program in the U.S. or Canada accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education or the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. During this period, the surgeon must gain broad knowledge of disease management as well as operative experience in general surgery.

2. Application for Certification

- Upon completion of their residency training, surgeons may apply for certification by the ABS. As part of the application, the residency director must attest to the applicant's surgical skills, ethics and professionalism. Surgeons must also hold a valid U.S. or Canadian medical license before they can be certified.

- If the application is approved by the ABS, the surgeon is admitted to the required examinations for certification.

3. Examinations

- In the first phase of the examination process, surgeons must take and pass an eight-hour written examination known as the Qualifying Examination, which assesses their knowledge of general surgery.
- Surgeons must then take and pass an oral examination called the Certifying Examination, which evaluates their surgical judgment and decision-making skills. Candidates are interviewed by experienced surgeons who assess their ability to diagnose and treat diverse problems in general surgery, as well as manage potential complications.
- If successful on this examination, the surgeon is deemed certified in general surgery and becomes a diplomate of the ABS.

Certification must be renewed every 10 years. To renew their certification, surgeons must demonstrate a commitment to professionalism and continuing education as well as pass a written examination; this has recently been expanded into a more continuous process called Maintenance of Certification (MOC).

Specialty Certification

The ABS also offers specialty certification in vascular surgery, pediatric surgery, surgical critical care, surgery of the hand, and hospice and palliative medicine. Certification in these areas requires training in an accredited training program for that specialty and success on the required examinations. These certificates must also be renewed every 10 years.

For more information, please visit the ABS website at www.absurgery.org.