

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 met 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.



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Your Surgeon is Certified by the American Board of Surgery



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A surgeon who is certified in surgery (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 postoperative care, as well as the treatment of complications in these areas.

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

Areas in which general surgeons provide care:

- **Digestive tract** – esophagus, stomach, small bowel, large bowel and rectum
- **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** – trauma and vascular, endocrine, birth defect and malignant disorders
- **Pediatric surgery** – surgical care for children of all ages, 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** – arteries and veins, including vascular access surgery for kidney dialysis patients and vascular surgery emergencies

What is Board Certification?

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

1. Education

- Candidates for certification must have graduated from an accredited medical school in the U.S. or Canada, or must be certified by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates.
- Candidates must also have completed five years in a surgery (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 operative experience in the areas listed previously.

2. Application for Certification

- Upon completion of their residency training, surgeons may apply for certification by the ABS. As part of the application, the director of the residency program must attest to the applicant's surgical skills, ethics and professionalism. Applicants must hold a valid license to practice medicine in the U.S. or Canada before they can be certified.
- If the application is approved by the ABS, the applicant is admitted to the required examinations for certification.

3. Examinations

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

Additional Certification

The ABS also offers certification in the specialty areas of pediatric surgery, vascular surgery, surgical critical care, and surgery of the hand. Certification in these areas requires training in an accredited training program for that specialty, similar educational requirements, and success on the required examinations.

What Does It Mean to Be Board Certified by the ABS?

To be certified by the American Board of Surgery means that the surgeon has met a defined standard of education, training and knowledge in the specialty of surgery (general surgery). Board certification is voluntary and therefore differs from medical licensure, which is required by law for an individual to practice medicine.

In 1976, the ABS switched from certificates that were valid indefinitely to certificates that are valid for 10 years. To maintain their certification, surgeons must demonstrate ongoing professionalism, show commitment to lifelong learning through continuing medical education (such as seminars, lectures, and the reading of journals), and pass a written examination.

The ABS is currently transitioning to recertification based on Maintenance of Certification, a broader professional development program with more frequent requirements for learning and assessment during the 10-year certification cycle.

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