

Otorhinolaryngology (ear, nose and throat (ENT) surgery)

Ear, nose and throat (ENT) surgeons diagnose, evaluate and manage diseases of the head and neck.

Their formal title is otorhinolaryngologist or otolaryngologist.

operating theatre

Life as an ENT surgeon

You'll treat people of all ages with a wide range of diseases which is what makes being an ENT surgeon so interesting and rewarding. You'll see more children than most other surgeons apart from those in paediatrics.

You'll treat conditions that affect the senses such as hearing and balance disorders or smell and taste problems. You'll also treat patients with conditions that affect their voice, breathing and swallowing as well as those with head and neck tumours.

ENT has possibly the widest range of operations of any speciality. You could treat ear conditions such as hearing loss, childhood 'glue ear' (where the middle ear is blocked with fluid), dizziness, ear infections and perforated ear drums.

You'll treat nose conditions such as sinus infections, nasal injuries, tumours and disorders of the sense of smell and throat conditions ranging from tonsillitis through breathing problems to cancers of the mouth or throat.

You'll also be involved in facial cosmetic surgery, for example on ears and noses and facial reconstruction following trauma or cancer. You will work closely with a range of other specialists including plastic surgeons, maxillofacial surgeons and ophthalmologists.

You will spend a higher proportion of your time in outpatient clinics seeing day cases and less time in surgery than other surgeons. You will not be on-call as much as in other surgical specialities, making it easier to achieve a work-life balance.

You will make use of the latest technology including robots and lasers to treat patients which often means minimally invasive surgery and faster recovery times. Advances in care mean that you can often deliver life-changing treatment, for example helping a profoundly deaf person gain a sense of hearing and sound for the first time after cochlear implant surgery.

How much can I earn?

You'll first earn a salary when you start your [foundation training](#) ^[1] after medical school. Find out details of current salary ranges for foundation and specialty training, [SAS doctors](#) ^[2] and consultants on the ['Pay for doctors'](#) ^[3] page.

How about the benefits?

- make a difference
- flexible and part-time working
- high income early in your career
- work anywhere in the world
- excellent pension scheme
- good holiday entitlement
- NHS discounts in shops and restaurants

Must-have skills

- excellent communication skills to manage a wide range of relationships with colleagues, and patients and their families
- emotional resilience, a calm temperament and the ability to work well under pressure
- teamwork and the capacity to lead multidisciplinary teams
- problem-solving and diagnostic skills
- outstanding organisational ability and effective decision-making skills
- first-class time and resource management for the benefit of patients
- a high degree of manual dexterity
- superb hand-eye co-ordination, excellent vision, and visuospatial awareness
- physical stamina to cope with the demands of surgery

Entry requirements

Your first step is medical school. Typically, you'll need excellent GCSEs and three A or A* passes at A level including chemistry for a five-year undergraduate degree in medicine. Many medical schools also ask for biology and others may require maths or physics.

If you already have a degree, you could study for a four-year postgraduate degree in medicine.

You'll need to pass an interview and admissions test. You'll be asked to show how you demonstrate the NHS values such as compassion and respect.

Some medical schools look to recruit a mix of students from different backgrounds and geographical areas, so your educational and economic background and family circumstances

could be considered as part of your application.

"The crossover and interaction with other specialties is vast in ENT, including neurosurgery, plastics [plastic surgery], oral and maxillofacial surgery. We work in multidisciplinary teams with physician colleagues and other specialists including speech and language therapists and physiotherapists, which is hugely enjoyable."

Read Charles' story ^[4].

What are my chances of starting a career in ENT?

In 2020 there were 131 applications for 23 specialty training places (a competition ratio ^[5] of 5.70).

How to become an ENT surgeon

After medical school, you'll join the paid two-year foundation programme ^[6] where you'll work in six placements in different settings.

After your foundation programme, you can apply for paid specialty training ^[7] to become an ENT surgeon, which will take a minimum of seven years.

You may be able to train part time, for example for health reasons or if you have family or caring responsibilities.

Where a career as an ENT surgeon can take you

You could:

- specialise or conduct research in areas such as conditions of just the ear, nose or throat, paediatric ENT, skull base surgery or facial plastics
- teach medical students or postgraduate students in training
- get involved in research at universities, the NHS or private sector

- **Live vacancies**

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• Further information

These organisations have further information about being an ENT surgeon, particularly as your career progresses. Take a look.

[British Association of Head and Neck Oncologists](#) [8]

[British Association of Paediatric Otolaryngology](#) [9]

[British Association of Otorhinolaryngologists \(ENT UK\)](#) [10]

[British Rhinological Society](#) [11]

[British Society of Otolaryngology](#) [12]

[Joint Committee on Intercollegiate Examinations](#) [13]

[Royal College of Surgeons](#) [14]

[Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh](#) [15]

[Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow](#) [16]

Other roles that may interest you

- [Audiovestibular medicine](#) [17]
- [Endocrinology and diabetes](#) [18]
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- [Respiratory medicine](#) [20]

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Links

[1] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Foundation_training [2]
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https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Competition_ratio [6] <https://foundationprogramme.nhs.uk/> [7]

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