

Working life (general surgery)

This page provides useful information on the working week as well as any on-call and other commitments, along with information on who you will work with. The attractions and challenges of the job are also in this section.

Emergency surgery will usually be a large part of your work – often around 50% of your workload.

As with any surgical specialty your working day is usually long – with early starts and late finishes typical.

Although surgery is your main responsibility, you will also be evaluating patients in outpatients' clinics and emergency departments and attending hospital ward rounds. Monitoring patients post-operatively is also a vital part of your job.

As a consultant you'll still have your share of [on call](#) ^[1] duties during evenings, nights and weekends. [Elective](#) ^[2] surgery is also part of the work. The balance of on-call and emergency work can vary according to your sub-specialty. For example most breast surgery is [elective](#) ^[2], whereas patients with acute [colorectal](#) ^[3] problems (colon, rectum and anus) often present as an emergency.

General surgeons work in smaller hospitals as well as larger teaching hospitals. There are greater opportunities for increased specialisation within large hospitals and specialist units.

General surgeons work with patients of all ages, from babies and children to elderly people. You will also explain procedures and treatment to the patients' families.

As with any area of surgery you'll have lots of administrative work to complete. This includes:

- writing letters to GPs and patients
- other paperwork
- attending departmental and multidisciplinary meetings
- undertaking research
- teaching undergraduate and postgraduate medical and dental students.

The EU [Working Time Directive](#) ^[4] limits the working week to 48 hours. It is also possible to work part-time once you are consultant, or to train on a less than full-time ^[5] basis (conditions apply).

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Who you will work with?

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General surgeons work as part of a multidisciplinary team.

Within the operating theatre you will work with:

- other surgeons
- anaesthetists [6]
- theatre nurses [7]
- medical students
- doctors in training
- operating department practitioners [8]

Outside theatre you will also work with a wide range of people including:

- patients and their families
- radiotherapy staff [9]
- nurses [10] including specialist cancer and stoma nurses
- administrative staff [11]
- other surgeons [12] and doctors including gastroenterologists [13]

Once you are a consultant surgeon you will be leading and managing your team.

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Attractions and challenges of the role

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General surgery is a very interesting role offering much variety and excellent opportunities to develop a subspecialty.

General surgeons often face a busy and challenging workload, particularly within emergency surgery. This can mean a heavy on-call commitment and long and irregular working hours at times.

The range of cases general surgeons treat is very wide-ranging and gaining broad experience is important. Surgical procedures are becoming more complex and there is a

need for on-going training and support for surgeons. The vast spectrum of disease treated within this specialty makes diagnosis both challenging and interesting.

The increasing use of less invasive surgical techniques with shorter recovery times means that the outcome for patients is much improved. Many patients now have a greater chance of surviving cancer than in the past, which is very rewarding for the surgeons involved.

Many patients can be treated successfully by general surgery. However, some very unwell patients develop serious complications and may need treatment in [intensive care](#) [14], with varying outcomes.

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/roles-doctors/surgery/general-surgery/working-life>

Links

- [1] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#On_call
- [2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Elective>
- [3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Colorectal>
- [4] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Working_Time_Directive
- [5] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/working-health/information-doctors/less-full-time-training-doctors>
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