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How to Become an Ultrasound Technician



By Dillon Price, Monster Contributor



Are you interested in a career in diagnostic imaging? When you learn how to become an ultrasound technician, you'll play an important role in helping doctors and patients pinpoint the causes of health conditions, as well as their locations within the human body.

Most ultrasound technicians work in hospitals, physicians' offices, medical and diagnostic laboratories, and outpatient care centers. If you're looking for job security, a career as an ultrasound technician may be right for you. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a **10% increase in new ultrasound tech positions** over the next decade.

Ready to learn how to become an ultrasound technician? Read on to find out what ultrasound techs do and what you'll need to get a job.

What Is an Ultrasound Technician?

Also known as a sonographer, an ultrasound technician is an **allied health professional** who works with ultrasonic imaging equipment to scan various parts of the human body. There are several types of ultrasound technicians, including diagnostic medical sonographers, cardiovascular sonographers, abdominal sonographers, and OB-GYN ultrasound technicians.

What Do Ultrasound Technicians Do?

Ultrasound technicians operate a variety of equipment including ultrasound machines, Doppler ultrasound machines, 3D and 4D ultrasound devices, and transvaginal and transrectal scanners. They also work closely with physicians and surgeons who base their diagnoses on ultrasound images.

Ultrasound techs typically look for cancers, blood clots, musculoskeletal issues, brain and spinal cord abnormalities, and heart and blood flow issues.

Other responsibilities of ultrasound technicians include:

- Explaining procedures to patients and answering any questions they have.
- Preparing exam rooms.
- Setting up and maintaining diagnostic imaging equipment.
- Preparing patients for imaging procedures.
- Reviewing images and test results for quality.
- Looking for abnormalities and other diagnostic information.
- Providing physicians with a summary of imaging and test findings.
- Recording findings and monitoring patients' records.

How to Become an Ultrasound Technician

Want to know how to become an ultrasound tech? For starters, you'll need to have the following skills:

- Attention to detail
- Effective communication skills
- Good hand-eye coordination
- Physical stamina
- The ability to operate complex equipment and computerized tools

Honing these skills is a good foundation for a career as an ultrasound tech. But you'll also need to fulfill specific education and licensure ultrasound technician requirements, which typically differ depending on the state you'll work in.

Education Requirements for Ultrasound Technicians

You'll need at least an associate degree or post-secondary certificate program in sonography and cardiovascular technology to become an ultrasound technician. However, many ultrasound techs have a bachelor's degree in diagnostic medical sonography.

Sonography degrees and certificate programs typically include coursework in medical terminology, anatomy, and applied sciences. You can find [tons of colleges](#) across the United States that offer ultrasound tech programs.

Ultrasound Tech Certification

Ultrasound tech certification isn't required in most states. However, it's highly recommended that you obtain a certificate. Not only can it boost your competency in sonography, but many employers require it.

You can obtain an ultrasound tech certification once you've completed a post-secondary education program. You can accomplish this by taking the two-hour-long [Sonography Principles & Instrumentation Examination](#) (SPI) offered by the American Registry for Diagnostic Medical Sonography (ARDMS). The SPI exam contains 110 multiple-choice questions that assess your competency in clinical safety, quality assurance, pulsed echo instrumentation, and physical principles.

Once you've passed the SPI, you'll then need to decide which credential you want to obtain and take the appropriate exam within five years. During this time, you can work as an ultrasound tech in states that don't require an ARDMS certificate. In fact, many employers will hire you after passing the SPI with the expectation that you'll pursue an ARDMS certificate while working full-time.

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The ARDMS offers the following credentials:

- **Registered Diagnostic Medical Sonographers (RDMS)**
- **Registered Diagnostic Cardiac Sonographer (RDCS)**
- **Registered Vascular Technologist (RVT)**
- **Registered Musculoskeletal Sonographer (RMSKS)**

If you plan on becoming a midwife sonographer, you'll need to take the **Midwife Sonography Examination (MW)**, which assesses your knowledge of the female reproductive system and stages of pregnancy. There are two parts to the MW exam:

- The Midwife Sonography Computer-Based Exam, which contains 100 multiple-choice questions that must be completed within two hours.
- The Practical Exam, which can be completed two years before or after taking the computer-based exam. The Practical Exam requires you to submit documentation of your clinical experience under the supervision of a reporting physician. The physician must have an active license and be trained to interpret OB-GYN or Maternal Fetal Medicine ultrasound studies.

Obtaining an Ultrasound Tech License

Depending on which state you live in, you may **need a license** to become an ultrasound tech. This is required in New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, and Oregon. If you live in one of these states, you'll need to satisfy the education and certification requirements set forth by your state licensing board. You'll also need to go through an application process, get a fingerprint card, pass a background check to be eligible for licensure.

Once you've passed an ARDMS exam, you'll need to apply directly with your state's licensing board and pay a fee of \$110. You must renew your license every two years to stay active.

How Long Does It Take to Become an Ultrasound Technician?

It can take anywhere from two to five years to become an ultrasound technician, depending on which educational path you take, where you live, and whether or not you decide to get certified.

How long is schooling for ultrasound tech jobs? You can expect to complete an associate degree in sonography within two years, a bachelor's degree within four years, or a college certificate program within one to two years.

How long it takes to obtain an ARDMS certificate depends on whether you pass or fail the SPI exam. If you don't pass the SPI, you'll have to wait 60 days to retake it. You can retrieve your ARDMS sonographer exam results immediately after taking it on-demand. However, windowed examination results can take two months after the testing period ends.

If you live in a state that requires a license and obtained an ARDMS certificate, it will take a few months for you to gather all the necessary materials and for the state to process them.

How Much Does an Ultrasound Tech Make?

Want to know how much ultrasound techs make? According to Monster's data, a typical ultrasound tech salary is **between \$25.32 and \$42.90 per hour**. Experience level, location, and education often influence what you'll make as an ultrasound tech. Plus, not all ultrasound tech jobs pay the same. For example, an OB-GYN ultrasound technician salary is typically on the higher end of this scale, at about \$70,000 a year.

Find out how much ultrasound techs make in your area by searching the job title and location on [Monster's Salary Estimator](#). In addition to your pay range, you'll also find a list of potential next steps to advance your career.

How to Find Ultrasound Tech Jobs

So, you've learned how to become an ultrasound technician. Take the next step in your career by putting together your resume to apply to ultrasound tech jobs. Try using Monster's [healthcare resume samples](#) as a reference. Then, put your cover letter into focus with these simple [writing and formatting tips](#).

Ready to begin your job search? Monster lists tons of [ultrasound tech jobs](#) across the U.S. and in these five cities where ultrasound techs are in demand:

- [New York City](#)
- [Houston](#)
- [Chicago](#)
- [Miami](#)
- [Boston](#)

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