



American Medical Women's Association
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What Courses Should I Take?

High School

If you have decided to pursue a career in medicine, you should focus on obtaining and maintaining good grades throughout high school and college. The basic requirements for high school graduation will likely cover the science classes that you need for college. However, the more advanced classes you take, such as Advanced Placement Biology, the better prepared you will be for the rigorous schedule of the premed student.

There are several classes that can help you out in your career that many high school students avoid including typing, foreign language, and computer classes. Many students do not take these because they don't see how they are relevant, but they often prove invaluable later in life. Most college courses require a fair amount of writing. It will save you time if you have learned how to type and use a computer. Foreign language skills are also important because so many patients do not speak English. Taking Latin is useful during college and medical school because many medical words have their roots in Latin words. Knowing Latin makes figuring out the meaning of much of the medical jargon easier.

College

You do not have to be a biology major to get into medical school. Many applicants choose biology as a major because it fits best with all the prerequisite courses that students must take. However, schools like to see diversity in courses that students have taken so that their education has exposed them to aspects of life other than medicine. Choose a major that interests you but make sure that you find time in your schedule for the science and math courses you will need.

Surviving the Required Courses

Most medical schools require you to take college courses that include one year each of general chemistry, organic chemistry, general biology, advanced level biology such as anatomy and physiology, and general physics. A few also require calculus. Consult with your guidance counselor about the most recent requirements. Courses such as biochemistry, genetics, and microbiology are not required but can help you on the MCAT and raise your science grade point average.

Many of the required courses are demanding. Organic chemistry is notorious for striking fear in the hearts of many premed students. Remember, "nothing good comes easy." If you experience problems in a particular course, speak with the professor and get help. Tutors may be available to aid students in need. Time requirements for these courses will be more than what you are probably used to from high school; your friends with different majors may have less work. Consider these classes an opportunity to test whether or not you really are committed to the demands of a career in medicine.

Using Summer Time Wisely During College

Summer is a time when many of your friends will take it easy. Try to find a summer job that will help finance your education, but if at all possible, use your summers to enhance your resume. An internship in healthcare or research with a professor can help you when you apply to medical school. This may also be a good time to get some volunteer work under your belt. Local hospitals are looking for volunteers and many doctors will let you watch procedures when they learn that you are a premed student. Such experiences can be rewarding and will allow you to decide whether or not medicine is the career for you. You may find a mentor who will help you get through the process of applying to medical school.

How Many Years of Training Does It Take?

The time frame for becoming a physician varies but usually begins with 4 years of undergraduate study ending in receipt of a degree (usually a Bachelor of Science or a Bachelor of Arts). This is traditional college. This is followed by 4 years of medical school and finally by completion of residency, which is training that lasts for 3 to 8 years depending on the specialty that is chosen.

The whole process takes dedication and the desire to learn massive amounts of material about the structure and function of the human body. Although the road is not easy, the rewards are great. Take the time to investigate all of your options carefully. Hopefully, AMWA's web site will give you some guidance and information that will help you make decisions.