

Otolaryngology

(pronounced oh/toe/lair/in/goll/oh/jee) is the oldest medical specialty in the United States. Otolaryngologists are physicians trained in the medical and surgical management and treatment of patients with diseases and disorders of the ear, nose, throat (ENT), and related structures of the head and neck. They are commonly referred to as ENT physicians.

What do otolaryngologists treat?

Otolaryngologists diagnose and manage diseases of the ears, nose, sinuses, larynx (voice box), mouth, and throat, as well as structures of the neck and face.

The ears—Hearing loss affects one in ten North Americans. The unique **domain** of otolaryngologists is the treatment of ear disorders. They are trained in both the medical and surgical treatment of hearing loss, ear infections, balance disorders, ear noise (tinnitus), and some cranial nerve disorders. Otolaryngologists also manage congenital (birth) disorders of the outer and inner ear.

The nose—About 35 million people develop chronic sinusitis each year, making it one of the most common health complaints in America. Care of the nasal cavity and sinuses is one of the primary skills of otolaryngologists. Problems in the nasal area include allergies, smell disorders, polyps, and nasal obstruction due to a deviated septum.

The throat— Communicating (speech and singing) and eating a meal all involve this vital area. Specific to otolaryngologists is expertise in managing diseases of the throat, larynx (voice box), and the upper aero-digestive tract or esophagus, including voice and swallowing disorders.

The head and neck—This area of the body includes the important functions of sight, smell, hearing, and the appearance of the face. In the head and neck area, otolaryngologists are trained to treat infections, benign (non-cancerous) and malignant (cancerous) tumors, facial trauma, and deformities of the face. They perform both cosmetic plastic and reconstructive surgery.

How are ear, nose, and throat specialists trained?

Otolaryngologists are ready to start practicing after completing up to 15 years of college and post-graduate training. To qualify for **certification** by the American Board of Otolaryngology, an applicant must first complete college (four years), medical school (four years), and at least five years of specialty training. Next, the physician must pass the American Board of Otolaryngology examination. In addition, some otolaryngologists pursue a one- or two- year fellowship for more extensive training in one of eight subspecialty areas.

These subspecialty areas are allergy, facial plastic and reconstructive surgery, head and neck, laryngology (throat), otology/neurotology (ears, balance, and tinnitus), pediatric otolaryngology (children), rhinology (nose), and sleep disorders. Some otolaryngologists limit their practices to one of these eight areas.

Why should I see an otolaryngologist?

These specialists differ from many physicians in that they are trained in both medicine and surgery. Otolaryngologists do not need to refer patients to other physicians when ear, nose, throat, or head/neck surgery is needed and, therefore, can offer the most appropriate care for each individual patient. Otolaryngologists are the most appropriate physicians to treat disorders of the ears, nose, throat, and related structures of the head and neck.