

How Do I... Deal with Application Anxiety?

Applying to medical school can feel overwhelming at times, but it doesn't always have to feel that way. It's normal to feel anxious about the process, but there are resources available to help you manage stress and keep yourself on track.

How will the committee view certain things on my application?

If you're worried about how an aspect of your application may be interpreted, or if you need clarification, it's okay to ask! First, share your concerns with a pre-health advisor to get their impressions and, if appropriate, contact the admissions office directly. Remember that many people have "blemishes" on their academic record. If, say, you have a grade in a science course that you wish was higher, remember that doing well in upper-level science course work will show that you overcame this deficiency and proved your proficiency in this area. Admissions officers are looking to see how you've grown or learned from these experiences and improved upon them. Be prepared to speak about this "distance travelled" during your interviews to show your awareness of the issue and how you surmounted it.

For application components such as the personal statement or essays, make sure you share your writing with your advisor, and also with a few trusted individuals of various backgrounds, experiences, and age groups. If your university has a writing center, you also might consider making an appointment to share your essay with them to ensure there are no grammatical or syntactical errors. Of course, it's always wise to be aware of [AMCAS® policies](#) regarding essay writing and completing your application, so be sure to read them over and comply with the rules.

What if I don't have enough research, shadowing, or volunteer experience?

It's true that the majority of successful applicants have research, shadowing, and/or volunteering experience, but it's important that you focus on the value of your experiences rather than taking a checklist approach. A single day spent volunteering does not carry the same weight as a yearlong volunteering commitment. Admissions offices pay attention to the length and quality of the experience and can tell if an applicant is trying to pad their application. However, the amount and kinds of activities expected of applicants varies significantly between

programs depending on the mission of the medical school. Research your potential schools to see if they are a good fit for your background and interests by reviewing their websites and/or their profiles on the [Medical School Admission Requirements](#) website, which includes each medical school's mission statement. You and your pre-health advisor can decide together if you're ready to apply or if taking a gap year to gain more experience could be a good option for you. More than half of accepted applicants take at least one [gap year](#), so it's okay if you need to take more time and apply later than you anticipated.

What if my family or other people are not supportive?

Sometimes, other people may have concerns and hesitations when someone they care about decides to pursue a career in medicine. Whether the concerns are based on cultural, financial, or personal reasons, it's important to create a respectful environment where you listen to each other. Work with a pre-health advisor, mentor, or spiritual advisor to strategize the best way to start the conversation. Remember to be courteous and logical. Using words like, "I researched" or "I evaluated the options" can go a long way in helping you present yourself as a well-reasoned adult. And ultimately, realize that this is your career, your passion, and a pathway that you have decided to follow.

How do I handle the pressure?

Academic pressure comes in many forms and from different people, including yourself. When a particular moment feels overwhelming, it's helpful to remind yourself how much you've already accomplished. Create a timeline with manageable deadlines and handle everything one step at a time. And most important, make sure to take mental breaks to recharge and do things you enjoy. Even a 15 minute walk can bring peace and clarity to a seemingly impossible day. It's important for you to maintain relationships with friends and family and schedule time for activities and events outside of school to help diffuse the pressure and revitalize you.

Establishing healthy stress management practices now also will benefit you in the long run. There will be times throughout your years in medical school, in residency, and as a practicing physician that are likely to be stressful and taxing. Learning skills and coping mechanisms now will help you in the future.

I'm stressed about the cost of financing medical school. What can I do about that?

Medical school is expensive. You'd be neglectful if you weren't concerned about the cost of your education and repaying your education debt. But know this: medical school graduates historically have had very low repayment default rates. There is a lot of help available to guide you through this process. The AAMC's **FIRST for Medical Education** program has numerous resources to educate you about financing medical school and repayment options as well as several helpful tools, such as the **Medloans® Organizer and Calculator** to help you plan for the most common repayment scenarios. There are several repayment programs such as Income-Based Repayment (IBR), Pay as You Earn (PAYE), and Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF)—all described on the FIRST website to help you wisely and responsibly repay your loans. Lastly, your medical school's financial aid office will work closely with you to help finance your education, explain your options, and educate you about a debt management plan that's right for you.

What if I feel like I'm in over my head?

It's okay to admit that you need help managing the pressure. In fact, it's completely normal to reach out to your pre-health advisor, mentor, or spiritual advisor to let them know when you're feeling overwhelmed. Remember, developing strategies now to help you manage a challenging course load is important. Many current and past medical students point to a famous analogy about learning in medical school being like *trying to drink from a fire hose*. It sounds intense, but these students also speak about learning new study techniques along the way that help them better manage their time, integrate this new knowledge, and excel as a med student. Admitting that something is difficult, but doable, can really improve your outlook.

Rest assured that, yes, as a medical school applicant you are entering a demanding and competitive process, but every successful doctor was in your place at some point. Those anxious feelings are normal, temporary, and manageable.

MORE INFORMATION:

Medical School Admission Requirements: www.aamc.org/msar

AMCAS® Policies and Instructions—Essays (Section Eight): <https://www.aamc.org/students/download/375260/data/2014amcasinstructionmanual.pdf>

FIRST (Financial Information, Resources, Services, and Tools): www.aamc.org/first

Medloans® Organizer and Calculator (free preview): <https://services.aamc.org/30/first/home>

Aspiring Docs Fact Sheets Library: <https://www.aamc.org/students/aspiring/296544/factsheets.html>