



NAAHP Fact Sheet for Premedical Students

Taking a “Gap” Year

Ten Reasons to Consider a Gap Year

Gap year, glide year, growth year, enrichment year—different advisors use different terms to talk about time taken between graduation from a college/university and matriculation into medical school, but they generally agree that taking time can be to the advantage of a medical school applicant.

Premeds submit the medical school application about 16 months before they intend to start medical school, which allows time for admissions committees to evaluate their thousands of applicants and decide whom to interview during the academic year between application and matriculation.

An aspiring physician who wishes to proceed directly from undergraduate graduation to medical school matriculation must then be confident that they can produce a competitive application by the end of the junior year. Here are ten reasons that advisors encourage you to consider a gap year:

- 1. You'll have more time to study for the MCAT if you haven't taken it yet.** Medical school applicants should apply early in the application cycle, which raises the chance of acceptance. Taking MCAT no later than April/May allows you to know your scores before you submit your application. There is more time to focus on studying for MCAT in summer than during the academic year.
- 2. You can use next year to solidify your GPA.** Academic metrics may improve in senior year when students have more control over course selection and more familiarity with college expectations. If you are a senior whose GPA is not competitive at schools of interest, advisers can discuss options to enhance your academic metrics before applying through postbaccalaureate coursework taken through a formal program or a la carte at a local college or university.
- 3. Your recommendation letters may be stronger.** The more classes and activities, the more opportunities to forge relationships with potential recommenders. Seniors may benefit from a letter from a junior summer internship supervisor or a senior research advisor. If you're a senior, going on to postbac class work provides more chances to get to know faculty, or if you go on to work, you could have an excellent professional reference.
- 4. You can get your finances in order.** Health professions school is expensive, as is the process of applying. Taking time away from school means that you may have to start repaying any student loans, but working full-time should allow you to make payments on loans (to defray some debt) while also saving some money to put toward applications and future expenses. If you have poor credit, rebuilding your credit record may also pay off when taking out medical school loans.
- 5. You'll have more time to focus on the preparations required to apply.** As an applicant, you will have essays to write, letters of evaluation to gather, MCAT to study for, schools to research, plus the rest of your life to manage, which could include job and internship applications, etc. If you cannot spend the time you need on application preparation now (and secondary essay writing this summer), it might be better to start getting organized this year, but focus on applying the following year.
- 6. “Everyone else is doing it.”** According to a national AAMC survey, over 60% of entering medical students have taken one or more years between college and medical school¹. Working with students who have taken time off, they typically recognize that they have benefited from that time to do something productive and gain maturity if they hadn't spent much time in the “real world.”
- 7. You can gain more experience and practice articulating your career interests on paper and aloud.** You can participate in activities that can convince schools that you have a realistic understanding of what you're about to undertake, which can also allow you to serve the community and to build skills and [competencies](#) valued by the profession. The more time you spend in these settings, the easier it will be to focus

¹ www.aamc.org/data-reports/students-residents/report/matriculating-student-questionnaire-msg

on applications since you'll have a more solid goal to work toward. If you need more experiences to back up your "gut feeling" that you "must" be a doctor or dentist or vet, take the time to find those experiences. If you're having trouble writing your essay, or practicing interview answers, you may need more time and experiences.

8. It can be hard for a junior to compete favorably with those who have rich life experience, and with seniors who have their complete academic history. Admissions committees have acknowledged that younger applicants might "suffer by comparison" to the older, more experienced applicant (according to a national survey, the median age at matriculation was 23; 16% were 26 or older, 32% of matriculants last year were 22 or younger).

9. Life is short! Once medical school begins, it becomes more difficult to take "time off"—you're more likely to have financial concerns, family concerns, and a professional schedule that will keep you from, say, traveling to Africa for six months, or learning to skydive, or pursuing independent research, or going to culinary school. Many national fellowships provide funding for a one- to two-year service/work opportunity that are only available to recent graduates.

10. Your brain could use the break. Medical student and physician burnout is reaching epidemic proportions. You may have been in school from kindergarten through college graduation without a break, and it can be beneficial to step away after 18+ years of school so that you can return renewed to the rigor of health professions school course work. Health professions school will still be there for you if you go and do these things and return to the application process later.

Partnering with your advisor

A prehealth advisor can be an invaluable resource as you navigate the reapplication process. They have worked with other applicants in your shoes in the past and can provide their perspectives based on this history. Here are some tips for working with a prehealth advisor:

1. Plan in advance: most advising offices work with a high volume of students. Be ready to schedule an appointment that may be a few weeks in the future.
2. Help you advisor get to know you: in advance of your appointment, provide a copy of your resume, a brief narrative of what you've been doing since your last meeting, and outline some of the questions that you have in advance so your advisor can be more prepared for your meeting.
3. Be ready with questions. Here are a few ideas:
 - Do you think my candidacy will be strong enough to apply and reach my goals this year?
 - If I apply after I graduate, what services can the university/advising office provide to me?
 - What areas of my premed preparation should I work on if i don't apply right away?
 - Based on your work with students who have goals and interests similar to mine, what suggestions do you have for what to do during my gap year(s)?
 - Are there past students whom you could connect me with who may have had similar experiences?

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