



Different Orthopedic Specialties

What are the differences?
Which one's for me?



Overview

Choosing a path in orthopedic medical device sales is one of the most important decisions a rep can make, because each subspecialty demands a different blend of skills, personality, lifestyle tolerance, and long-term career goals. While all orthopedic segments share the common thread of supporting surgeons and improving patient outcomes, the day-to-day reality of the work varies dramatically.

Divisions vary by company.

Sports Medicine

CASE TYPE

- Arthroscopy (shoulder, knee, hip)
- ACL and ligament reconstruction
- Rotator cuff repair
- Meniscus repair
- Shoulder stabilization

PRODUCTS

- Suture anchors (metal, PEEK, all-suture)
- Sutures and knotless systems
- Arthroscopes, towers, shavers, RF devices
- Biologics (PRP, BMAC, scaffolds)
- Disposable arthroscopy instruments

REP LIFESTYLE

- High OR volume, especially mornings
- Seasonal spikes tied to sports injuries
- Frequent interaction with tech-forward surgeons
- Moderate call; mostly elective cases

Joint

CASE TYPE

- Total knee arthroplasty (TKA), total hip arthroplasty (THA)
- Partial knee replacements, revision hip and knee surgeries
- Complex deformity or reconstruction cases

PRODUCTS

- Knee systems
- Hip stems, cups, liners, heads
- Robotic platforms and navigation systems
- Cemented and cementless fixation options
- Revision systems and augments

REP LIFESTYLE

- High-volume elective cases
- Early mornings, predictable schedules
- Deep, long-term surgeon relationships
- Heavy emphasis on pre-op planning, implant selection, and OR efficiency

Foot and Ankle

CASE TYPE

- Bunion corrections (Lapidus, MIS)
- Flatfoot reconstruction
- Hammertoe and forefoot procedures
- Achilles repairs
- Trauma crossover (ankle fractures, pilon fractures)

PRODUCTS

- Plates, screws, locking systems
- Intramedullary nails
- Total ankle replacement systems
- Biologics (grafts, wedges)
- External fixation (some portfolios)

REP LIFESTYLE

- Balanced OR/clinic mix
- Moderate call due to trauma crossover
- Works with podiatrists and orthopedic F&A surgeons

Upper Extremity

CASE TYPE

- Total shoulder arthroplasty (anatomic and reverse)
- Rotator cuff augmentation (overlaps with sports)
- Elbow arthroplasty
- Distal radius fractures
- Wrist arthroscopy and ligament repairs

PRODUCTS

- Anatomic and reverse shoulder systems
- Elbow replacement systems
- Plates, screws, and fracture fixation sets
- Arthroscopy tools for shoulder and elbow

REP LIFESTYLE

- Strong overlap with sports medicine and trauma reps
- Moderate call depending on trauma volume
- Cases vary from short arthroscopy to long arthroplasty
- Requires strong understanding of shoulder mechanics
- Works closely with surgeons who value technical reps

Spine

CASE TYPE

- Cervical and lumbar fusions
- Decompression procedures
- Scoliosis and deformity correction
- Tumor and trauma cases
- Navigation- and robotics-assisted procedures

PRODUCTS

- Pedicle screws, rods, plates
- Interbody cages (PEEK, titanium, expandable)
- Biologics (BMP alternatives, grafts)
- Navigation systems, robotics platforms
- Lateral and anterior access systems

REP LIFESTYLE

- Long, technically complex cases
- Some urgent add-ons but fewer emergencies
- Works with orthopedic spine surgeons and neurosurgeons
- Requires deep technical knowledge

Cranio-Maxillofacial

CASE TYPE

- Facial trauma (mandible, midface, orbital)
- Orthognathic surgery
- Cranial vault reconstruction
- TMJ procedures
- Custom implant cases

PRODUCTS

- Plates and screws (micro, mini, reconstruction)
- Distraction osteogenesis devices
- Custom cranial and facial implants
- Resorbable fixation systems
- Cutting guides and patient-specific solutions

REP LIFESTYLE

- Moderate call due to trauma
- Smaller but specialized case volume
- Works with OMFS, plastics, ENT, trauma teams
- Requires comfort with delicate anatomy

Trauma

CASE TYPE

- Long bone fractures (femur, tibia, humerus)
- Pelvic and acetabular trauma
- Wrist, ankle, distal radius fractures
- Polytrauma and high-energy injuries
- External fixation and temporary stabilization

PRODUCTS

- Intramedullary nails
- Plates and screws (locking, non-locking)
- External fixators
- Fragment sets
- Power tools and instrumentation

REP LIFESTYLE

- 24/7 call, nights, weekends, holidays
- Highly unpredictable schedule
- Works with hospital-based trauma surgeons
- Fast-paced, high-stress environment
- High case volume and hospital presence



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SUMMARY

Each orthopedic segment has its own case types, products, surgeon relationships, and lifestyle demands, and understanding these differences is essential for choosing the path that fits your strengths and career goals. Whether you prefer fast-paced trauma work, predictable elective joints, technical spine cases, or relationship-driven sports and upper extremity procedures, this guide helps you quickly see how each specialty operates and what day-to-day life looks like for the reps who support them.

WHAT NEXT?

Still unsure which direction to take? Connecting with reps in these spaces is one of the most reliable ways to get a real feel for their day-to-day work, sales rhythms, compensation models, challenges, and long-term growth paths. Those conversations will give you clearer insight than job descriptions ever can. Being intentional about who you meet and what roles you pursue will pay off over time. Instead of applying blindly, approach your search informed and confident about what you want and why it fits you.