

## MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY GLOSSARY

You can build many hundreds of medical words if you learn a relatively few basic parts which can be combined in a variety of ways. A complicated medical word will seem less difficult if you analyze it after you learn the meaning of these fundamental parts.

The foundation of a word is the "word root." Examples of word roots are: **abdomin-** referring to the belly region, and **aden-** pertaining to a gland. A word root is often followed by a vowel to facilitate pronunciation, as in **abdomino-** and **adeno-**. We then refer to it as a "combining form." The hyphen appended to a combining form indicates that it is not a complete word, and if the hyphen precedes the combining form, then it commonly appears as the terminal element or the word ending, as in **-algia**, meaning "a painful condition."

A "prefix" is a part of a word which precedes the word root and changes its meaning. For example, the prefix **mal-** in **malunion** means "an abnormal" union. A "suffix" or word ending is a part that follows the word root and adds to or changes its meaning. The suffix **-rrhea** means "profuse flow" or "discharge," and in **diarrhea**, a condition in which there is excessive discharge of liquid stools. Many words may be used as prefixes, root words or suffixes with only slight modifications.

Many medical words are "compound" words; that is, they are made up of more than one root or combining form. Examples of such compound words are **erythrocyte** (red blood cell) and **hydrocele** (a fluid containing sac), and many more difficult words, such as **sternoclavicular** (indicating relationship to both the sternum and the clavicle).

A general knowledge of language structure and spelling rules is also helpful in mastering medical terminology. For example, adjectives include words that end in **-al**, as in **sternal** (the noun is **sternum**), and words that end in **-ous**, as in **mucous** (the noun is **mucus**).

The following list includes some of the most commonly used word roots, combining forms, prefixes and suffixes. Words classified as prefixes may sometimes be root words or suffixes and vice-versa.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| a-, an-: absent, deficient, lack   | ambly-: dimness, dullness  |
| ab-: away from, from   | -an: pertaining to   |
| -able: capable of, having ability to   | andro-: male, masculine  |
| abdomin-, abdomino-: the belly or abdominal area   | angi-: vessel  |
| -ac, -al: pertaining to  | ankyl-, ankylo-: bent, fusion  |
| acou-, acu-: hearing, sound  | ant-, anti-: against, to prevent, suppress, or destroy                       |
| acr-, acro-: extreme ends of a part, especially of the extremities   | -ant: having the characteristic of   |
| actin-, actini-, actino-: a relationship to ray-like structures or, more commonly, to light or roentgen (x)rays, or some other type of radiation | ante-: before, ahead of  |
| ad-: to, toward, added to, near  | antero-: a position ahead of or in front of (i.e., anterior to) another part |
| aden-, adeno-: gland   | arthr-, arthro-: joint or articulation                                       |
| -agogue: inducing, leading, stimulating  | -ary: connected with   |
| -agra: severe pain   | -asis, -asia, -esis, -osis: condition or state of                            |
| alb-: white  | -asthenia: weakness  |
| alge-, algo-, algesi-: pain  | -ation: process, action, condition   |
| -algia: pain, painful condition  | audio-: sound, hearing   |
| alveol-: cavity, socket  | aut-, auto-: self  |
| amb-, ambi-, ambo-: both, on two sides   |  |
|  | basi-: base  |
|  | bi-: two, twice, double, both  |
|  | bili-: bile, gall  |

bio-: life, a living organism  
blast-, blasto-: an early stage, an immature cell or bud  
blenn-, blenno-: mucus  
bleph-, blephar-, blepharo-: eyelid, eyelash  
brachi-: arm  
brachy-: short  
brady-: slow  
bronch-, broncho-: windpipe or other air tubes, trachea  
bucc-: cheek  
  
capit-: head  
carcin-: cancer  
cardi-, cardia-, cardio-: heart  
cata-: down, lower, under, against  
-cel, -cele: swelling, enlarged space or cavity  
-centesis: puncture, usually for drainage  
centi-: relating to 100  
cephal-, cephalo-: head  
cerebro-: brain  
cheil-, cheilo-: lips, a brim or an edge  
cheir-, cheiro-: hand  
chol-, chole-, cholo-: bile, gall  
chondr-, chondri-, chondrio-: cartilage  
chrom-, chromat-, chromato-: color  
chrono-: time  
-cid, -cide, -cis: cut, kill, destroy  
cili-: eyelash  
circum-: around, surrounding  
cirrh-: yellow  
clas-, -clast: break  
cleid-, cleido-: clavicle  
co-, com-, con-: with, together  
colp-, colpo-: vagina  
contra-: against, opposite  
cor-, coron-: heart  
cost-, costa-, costo-: ribs  
counter-: against, opposite to  
crani-, cranio-: skull  
cry-, cryo-, crymo-: low temperature, cold  
crypt-, crypto-: hidden, concealed  
cut-: skin  
cyano-: blue  
cysti-, cysto-: sac, bladder

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cyt-, cyto-, -cyte, -cytic: cell

dacry-, dacryo-: lacrimal glands  
dactyl-, dactylo-: digits  
de-: down, from  
demi-, hemi-: half  
derm-, derma-, dermo-: skin  
dermat-, dermat-: skin  
di-, diplo-: two, twice, double  
dia-: through, between  
dis-: apart, away from, separation  
dolicho-: long  
dorsi-, dorso-: back  
dura-: hard  
-dynia: pain, tenderness  
dys-: disordered, difficult, painful  
  
e-, ec-, ex-, exo-: out from, out of  
-ectasia, -ectasis: stretching, dilation, expansion  
ecto-: outside  
-ectomize, -ectomy: excision of, surgical removal of  
electr-, electro-: referring to electricity  
em-, en-: in, on  
-ema: swelling, distension  
-emia: condition of blood  
encephal-, encephalo-: brain  
end-, endo-: within, innermost  
enter-, entero-: intestines  
epi-: on, upon  
erythr-, erythro-: red  
-esis: condition, process  
-esthesia: sensation, feeling  
eu-: well, normal, good  
ex-, exo-: outside, away from  
extra-: beyond, outside of, in addition to  
  
-ferent: carry, bear  
fibr-, fibro-: fibers, threadlike structures  
-form: shape  
fore-: before, in front of  
  
galact-, galacta-, galacto-: milk  
gastr-, gastro-: stomach

-gen: agent that produces or originates  
 (noun form)  
 -genic: produced from, producing  
 genito-: organs of reproduction  
 geno-: related to reproduction or sex  
 geny-: jaw (note: this is only for the prefix)  
 -geny: manner of origin, development or  
 production  
 gingiv-: gum  
 glia-, glio-: gluey material, the connective  
 tissue of the brain  
 gloss-, glosso-: tongue  
 gly-, glyco-: sweet, relating to sugar  
 gon-: seed, knee  
 -gram: record, that which is recorded (noun  
 form)  
 -graph: instrument for recording  
 -graphy: process of recording  
 gravid-: pregnant  
 gyn-, gyne-, gynec-, gyno-: female gender  
  
 hem-, hema-, hemato-, hemo-: blood  
 hemi-: half  
 hepar-, hepat-, hepato-: liver  
 heter-, hetero-: other, different  
 hist-, histio-: tissue  
 homeo-, homo-: same, unchanging  
 hydr-, hydro-: water  
 hyper-: above, excessive, over  
 hypo-: under, deficient, beneath  
 hyster-, hystero-: uterus  
  
 -ia: state, condition  
 -iatrics, -iatry, -trics: medical practice  
 specialties  
 -ician: person associated with  
 -ics: art or science of  
 idio-: self, distinct, one's own, separate  
 ileo-: ileum  
 ilio-: flank, ilium  
 im-, in-: in, inside, lacking, not  
 infra-: beneath  
 inter-: between, among  
 intra-: within a part or structure  
 -ion: action, condition resulting from action  
 -ism: condition, state

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 iso-: equal, like  
 -ist: one who practices  
 -itis: inflammation  
 -ive: relating to  
  
 kerat-, kerato-: cornea of eye, certain horny  
 tissues  
 kines-: motion  
  
 labi-: lip  
 lachry-, lachri-: tears  
 lact-, lacto-: milk  
 laparo-: loin, flank, abdomen  
 later-: side  
 lepto-: small, slender, thin  
 leuko-, leuk-, leuko-: white  
 lingua-: tongue  
 lip-, lipo-: fat  
 lith-, litho-: stone  
 -logy, -ology: the study or science of  
 lumbo-: lower back, loin  
 lyso-, -lysis: destruction, dissolution,  
 flowing, loosening  
  
 macro-: large, great, abnormal length  
 macul-: spot, blotch  
 mal-: disordered, bad, abnormal  
 malac-, malaco-, -malacia: softening  
 malign-: bad, harmful  
 mamm-: breast  
 mast-, masto-: breast  
 medi-: middle  
 meg-, mega-, megal-, megalo-, -megaly:  
 excessively large or enlarged  
 melan-: black  
 men-, meno-: uterine bleeding  
 mening-, meningo-: membranes covering  
 brain and spinal cord  
 ment-, mento-: mind, chin  
 mes-, meso-, mesa-: middle, midline  
 meta-: change, beyond, near, after, over  
 metro-: uterus  
 micro-: small  
 mono-: one  
 morpho-: form, shape  
 my-, myo-: muscle

myc-, mycet-, myco-: fungi  
myel-, myelo-: marrow, spinal cord

necr-, necro-: death, corpse  
neo-: new, strange  
neph-, nephro-: kidney  
neur-, neuro-: nerves  
noct-, nocti-: night  
nos-, noso-: disease  
null-, nulli-: none  
nyct-: night

ocul-, oculo-: eye  
odont-, odonto-: teeth  
-oid: resembling, likeness  
olig-, oligo-: few, small, deficient  
-ologist: specialist  
-oma: tumor, a swelling  
onco-: mass, tumor  
onych-, onycho-: nails  
oo-, ovi-, ovo-: egg, ovum  
oophor-, oophoro-: ovary  
ophthalm-, ophthalm-: eye  
or-: mouth  
orch-, orcho-, orchid-, orchido-: testicle  
orth-, ortho-: straight, normal  
-ory: pertaining to  
-ose: full of  
-osis: condition, disease  
-  
osmo-: odor, sense of smell  
oss-, osseo-, ossi-: bone, bone tissue  
oste-, osteo-: bone, bone tissue  
ostomy: create an opening by surgery  
ot-, oto-: ear  
-otomy: surgical incision, cutting into  
ovar-, ovario-: ovary

palpebr-: eyelid  
pan-: all  
para-: near, beyond, beside, apart from  
part-: birth, delivery, labor  
path-, patho-, pathy-, -pathy: disease,  
abnormal condition  
ped-, pedia-: child or foot  
-penia: deficiency, lack of

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peps-: digest  
per-: through, excessively  
peri-: around  
-pexy: fixation  
phag-, phago-: eat, ingest  
-phagia, -phagy: eating, swallowing  
-phasia: speech, ability to talk  
phil-, -phil, -philic: to be fond of; to like  
have an affinity for  
phob-, -phobe, -phobic: fear, dread,  
abnormal aversion  
phon-: voice, sound  
phren-: diaphragm  
pile-, pili-, pilo-: hair, resembling hair  
-plasia, -plasty: development formation,  
molding  
-plegia, -plexy: stroke, paralysis  
pleur-, pleuro-: side, serous membrane  
lining lung and chest cavity, rib  
-pnea: to breathe, air  
pneum-, pneuma-, pneumo-, pneumon-,  
pneumato-: lung, air  
-poiesis: production, forming, making  
pod-, podo-: foot  
polio-: gray  
poly-: many  
post-: behind, after, following  
pre-: before, ahead of  
presby-: old age  
prim-: first  
pro-: in front of, before  
proct-, procto-: rectum, anus  
proto-: first  
pseud-, pseudo-: false  
psych-, psycho-: mind, soul  
-ptosis: falling, sagging, prolapse,  
downward displacement  
pulmo-, pulmono-: lung  
py-, pyo-: pus  
pyel-, pyelo-: kidney, pelvis, or opening  
passage

rachi-, rachio-: spine  
ren-: kidney  
retro-: backward, located behind

rheo-: flow of matter or of a current of electricity  
 rhin-, rhino-: nose  
 -rrhage, -rrhagia: bursting forth, abnormal discharge, excessive flow  
 -rrhaphy: suturing of or sewing up of a gap or defect in a part  
 -rrhea: flow, discharge  
  
 salping-, salpingo-: uterine (Fallopian) tube  
 schizo-: split, divide  
 scler-, sclero-: hardness  
 scolio-: twisted, crooked  
 -scope: instrument for viewing or examining a part  
 semi-: mild, partial, half  
 sep-, septic-: poison, rot, decay  
 -sis: condition or process, usually abnormal  
 soma-, somat-, somato-: body  
 somni-: sleep  
 splanchn-, splanchno-: internal organs  
 sta-, -stasis, stat-: stop, stand still, remain at rest  
 -sthenia, -sthenic: strength  
 sten-, steno-: contracted, narrowed  
 sthen-, stheno-: strength  
 -stomy: creation of mouth or artificial opening  
 sub-: under, below, near, almost  
 super-: over, above, excessive  
 supra-: location above or over  
 sym-, syn-: with, together  
 syring-, syringo-: fistula, tube, cavity  
  
 tacho-, tachy-: rapid, fast, swift  
 tars-, tarso-: eyelid, foot  
 -taxia, -taxis: order, arrangement  
 tegument-: skin, covering  
 tens-: stretch, pull  
 terat-, terato-: malformed fetus  
 tetra-, quadra-: four  
 therm-, thermic, thermo-, thermy: heat  
 thromb-: clot, lump  
 -tic: pertaining to  
 -tomy: cutting into, incision into  
 tox-, toxic-, toxico-: poison

trache-: windpipe  
 trans-: across, through, beyond  
 tri-: three  
 trich-, tricho-: hair  
 -tripsy: crushing  
 -trophic, -trophy: state relating to nutrition or growth  
 -tropic: turning toward, influencing, changing  
 tympan-: eardrum  
  
 -ular: pertaining to  
 uni-: one  
 -uria: urine  
  
 vas-, vaso-: vessel, duct  
 viscer-, viscer-: internal organs  
  
 xero-: dryness  
  
 zoo-: animal

-phrenia - mental state  
 -plasia, plasm - growth  
 -sarco - flesh