## A Poor Man's Tour of Medical Terminology

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#### INTRODUCTION

Most words used to describe anatomical structures and physiological processes are based upon Latin or Greek roots. The same is true of the words used to describe medical conditions, procedures, and specialties. The following tables list in alphabetical order some prefixes, suffixes and word roots commonly encountered in the study of medical subjects and in medical settings.

This material is not intended as a substitute for more systematic study, nor are all possible prefixes, suffixes and word roots included. But the tables that follow will help you determine the meaning of unfamiliar terms encountered in the study of speech and hearing that have relevance to medicine and medical practice.

#### **ENTRY LEVEL SKILLS**

None.

#### **INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES**

When you finish this material, you should be able to do each of the following correctly and without help.

- 1. Identify prefixes, suffixes and root words commonly encountered in the study of anatmomy and physiology.
- 2. Decode or "deconstruct" such expressions to determine their literal meaning.
- 3. Create new expressions to amaze your friends and baffle your instructors.

## What is Medical Terminology?

The words - or terms - which make up the language of medicine are referred to as the terminology of the medical field, or Medical Terminology. Like every other language, Medical Terminology has changed over time, but the majority of terms are based in Latin or Greek.

## **How Does Medical Terminology Work?**

Most medical terms can be broken down into one or more word parts. For simplicity in explanation, let's say that there are four possible word parts, and any given medical term may contain one, some, or all of these parts:

- 1. roots,
- 2. prefixes,
- 3. suffixes, and
- 4. <u>linking or combining vowels</u>.

An example of a word with three of the above parts is the medical term **pericarditis**, which means *inflammation of the outer layer of the heart*. Pericarditis can be divided into three parts:

peri - card - itis

Once divided into its essential parts, pericarditis can be translated:

- the prefix peri translates to surrounding,
- the root card translates to heart, and
- the suffix itis translates to inflammation.

Hence, **pericarditis** is *an inflammation of the area surrounding the heart*, or an inflammation of the outer layer of the heart, anatomically known as the pericardium.

Medical terms always consist of at least one <u>root</u>, although they may contain more. The root of a word is that part which contains the essential meaning of the word. An example of this was seen above in the term **pericarditis**. The root of the word - **card** - refers to the heart, so any <u>prefix</u> or <u>suffix</u> added to the root (card) will only function to add to the specificity of that word. An example of this would be the prefix **brady**, which means *slow*. If "brady" is added to the root "card", the term **bradycard** - which roughly means *slow heart* - is created. Then, if the suffix **ia** - which means abnormal state - is added to "bradycard", the medical term **bradycardia** is formed. The translation of bradycardia (**brady-card-ia**) is **slow - heart - abnormal state**, or the abnormal state of a slow heart rate.

## **Prefixes (word beginnings)**

<u>Prefix</u>	<u>Definition</u>			
a-, an-	without, absence of			
ante-	prior to, before			
anti-	contrary to, against			
bi-, bin-	two			
bio-	living things			
brady-	slow			
de-	intense			
dia-	thorough or complete			
dip-	two			
dys-	abnormal, painful			
endo-	within, inside of			
epi-	over, on top of			
eu-	good			
ex-, exo-	outward, exterior			
ger-	old or aged			
hemi-	half			
hyper-	over, above, excessive			
idio-	unknown			
hypo-	under, below, deficient			
inter-	between within inside of			
intra-	within, inside of			
macro- meta-	large			
micro-	beyond small			
mon-, mono-	one, singular			
multi-	many			
nulli-	none			
pan-	all, every, total			
para-	beside, around, near			
ped-	child or youth			
per-	through			
peri-	surrounding			
poly-	many			
post-	after, following			
pre-, pro-	before, prior to			
pseudo-	false			
quad-	four			
re-	again			
sub-	under, below			
syn-	joined, together			
tachy-	rapid or fast			
tetra-	four			
trans-	through, across			
tri-	three			

# Suffixes (word endings)

-ac, -al, -an, -ar, -ary -algia -asthenia -asthenia -aten(verb ending) -celle -centesis -clasts, -clast -desis -dynia -eal -ectasis -ectorny -ectasis -ectorny -graph -ia, -ic -ia, -ic -itis -malacia -megaly -meter -metry -ord -ord -ord -ord -ord -ord -ord -ord	<u>Suffiix</u>	<u>Definition</u>				
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ratidening	-sclerosis	hardening				
-scope a device used for looking	-scope					
-scopic pertaining to visual examination	-scopic					
-scopy the act of visual examination	-scopy					
-sis state of	-sis					
-spasm sudden involuntary contraction	-spasm					
-stat in place, unmoving						
-thorax the chest						
-tipsy, -tripsy surgical crushing or destruction	-tipsy, -tripsy	surgical crushing or destruction				

-tome	instrument used to cut
-trophy	development, nourishment

## **Word Roots**

Word Root	<u>Definition</u>					
acou	hearing					
acr	extremities					
aden	gland					
andr	man, male					
angi	blood vessel					
ankly	crooked, bent, stiff					
anter, anteri, anterior	front, before, prior to					
arche	initial, beginning					
arthr	joint					
artic	connect					
atel	imperfect, incomplete					
ateri	artery					
audi	hearing					
auri	ear					
carcin	cancer					
cardi	heart					
carp	wrist					
caud	tail or down, tailward or downward					
celi	abdominal cavity					
cephal	head or up, headward or upward					
cerebr	brain					
cervic	neck					
cheil	lip					
chondr	cartilage					
chrom	color					
col	colon					
cor	pupil					
cost	rib					
crani	skull					
crypt	hidden					
cutane	skin					
cyan	blue					
cyst	bladder or sac					
cyt	cell					
dacyr	tear					
derm, derma, dermat	skin					
dextr, dexter disease	right (as opposed to left) a group of symptoms and signs					
dist	a group or symptoms and signs away from					
dors	back (as opposed to front)					
electr	electrical					
encephal	electrical brain					
enter	intestine					
epitheli	skin					
erythr	red					
esophag	esophagus					
eti	cause					
fenestr	window					
gast	stomach					
gingiv	gum					
gloss	tongue					
3						

glyc, glycos sugar gnos knowledge woman, female gyn, gynec blood hem hepat liver other, different heter tissue hist homo same, consistent hyster uterus iatr physician ile ileum incidence in diagnosis, the rate of new cases infer, inferi, inferior below ir, irid iris of the eye blockage or deficiency isch cornea; hard or horny tissue kerate movement, motion kinesi kyph hump **lacrim** tear lamina shelf or plate abdominal wall of cavity lapar laryng larynx (voice box) side later white leuk lingue tongue lord bent forward mamm, mast breast meatus opening medi, media, mesi middle black melan menisc, meniscus crescent-shaped mort, morti, mortus dead my, myos muscle myc fungus spinal cord myel myring eardrum nose nas nat birth necr death, dead nephr kidney nerve neur occlude to close or shut occult concealed, covered ocul, op, opthalm eye tumor onc onych nail opt vision or mouth orchid testicle bone oste ot ear pachy thick palip the palm of the hand path disease peps digestion percus to hit or strike stone petr phag swallowing, eating phalang finger or toe speech, speaking phas

mind

phren

phleb vein pleg paralysis pne breathing pneum, pneumat, pneumon ung, air gray, gray matter behind, back post, posteri, posterior prevalence in diagnosis, the total number of cases proct rectum prostat prostate gland proxim near, close psych mind pus ру vertebra, spine rachi rect rectum kidney ren retin retina striat striped rhabd rod-shaped rhin nose rhytid wrinkles siccare dry connective tissue, flesh sarc sclera, the white of the eye scler curved or crooked scoli sigm "S" shaped sign in diagnosis, a characteristic of a disease sinistr, sinister left (as opposed to right) cavity sinus place, situation situ body somat sound son pulse sphygm breathing, breathe spir to stop or control stasis immediately stat, statim sten narrowing breast bone (sternum) stern steth chest stomat, stomata mouth or opening super, superi, superior above, on top of in diagnosis, a complaint symptom techno applied art, science or skill ten, tendon tendon death thanat thorac chest thromb blood clot tom cut, section tox, toxic poison windpipe (trachea) trache trich hair development troph tympan middle ear ur urine, urinary tract ven vein vertebr vertebra, spine viscer internal organs vita life vitro glass xanth yellow

### **Linking or Combining Vowels**

As was discussed above, a medical term must have at least one root, but does not have to have a prefix and/or a suffix. An example of this is the term **sternocleidomastoid**, which is a muscle that has attachments at the sternum, the clavicle, and the mastoid. The term sternocleidomastoid can be divided into three parts (three roots, in this case): **stern - o - cleid - o - mastoid**. Notice that there are vowels between the three roots. These are **linking or combining vowels**, which serve to make a term easier to pronounce.

The vowel used most of the time is o, but other vowels such as i and a are also used.

Combining vowels are often used between roots and suffixes or roots and other roots, but they are NOT used between prefixes and roots.

#### **APPLICATION**

Many words can be deconstructed (and, hence, better understood) by identifying and defining the parts that make up those words. For example, the word otorrhea consists of the preffix ot (meaning "ear") and the suffix orrhea (meaning "flow or discharge"). Thus, "otorrhea" designates a flow or discharge from the ear. Similarly, the phrase aurus sinister refers to the left (sinister) ear (aurus or auri) and the word dysphagia identifies abnormal (dys) swallowing (phag plus ia, which means "pertaining to"). The word diagnosis means complete (dia) knowledge (gnosis), presumably of a disease.

Use these tables to deconstruct the following sets of terms and to determine how they are similar and how they are different.

- 1. Aphasia and dysphasia.
- 2. Etiology and mycology.
- 3. Aphonia, dysphonia, and dysphagia.
- 4. Gnosology and toxicology.
- 5. Hypoacusis and dysacusis.
- 6. Glossopathy and glossectomy.
- 7. Laryngectomy and laryngotomy.
- 8. Otorhinolaryngology and cystology.
- 9. Audiologist, audiometer and audiogram.
- 10. Myringoplasty and myringotomy.
- 11. Tympanoplasty and rectoplasty.
- 12. atragenic and diagnosogenic.
- 13. Myringitis and laryngitis.
- 14. Thantology and euthanasia.
- 15. Otoscope and arthroscope.
- 16. Hemiplegic and quadraplegic.
- 17. Phlebotomist and psychologist.
- 18. Electroardiogram and electro-encephalogram.
- 19. Bradycardia and tachycardia.

No one has yet done so with any serious intent, but here are some words that could be created using the word parts given below: psychectomy, rhinoid, cryptorrhea, caudasthenia, idioxanthosis, iatrorrhexis, laryngotome,

polymicrolamina, phrenasthenia, and phrenodesis. Can you figure out what they mean? Better yet, can you make up five new, really goofy words?

Better yet, can you make up some new, really goofy words? Listed below are a number of word parts. Fill in the blanks to see what you can come up with.

Number	Prefix	Root	Sufix	Meaning?
1	Para-			
2	Pseudo-			
3		-ankly-		
4		-cypt-		
5			-stat	
6			-scopy	
7	Meta-			
8	Endo-			
9		-crani-		
10		-lingue-		
11			-ologist	
12			-graphy	

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