BASIC MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY IN ENGLISH

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Abstract: *Medical terminology refers to words used in medical contexts, and this specialized vocabulary can be difficult to understand for those unfamiliar with it. The following is an introduction to medical terminology basics that will help you navigate the world of healthcare. As a future healthcare interpreter, it is important to understand basic Greek and Latin roots. While they may seem incredibly complex at first, do not worry: you already use ancient words every day (like automobile, multimedia, and video) – without even thinking about them!*

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Most medical terms consist of three basic components: the root word (the base of the term), prefixes (in front of the root word), and suffixes (at the end of the root word). When combined, you can define a specific medical term.

For example, the word "neuroblastoma" can be broken down this way:

"Neuro" - nerves

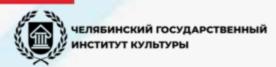+

"Blast" - immature cell development

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"Oma" - a cyst or tumor

How to Study Medical Terminology: Start at the Root

Almost every medical term consists of root words and likely uses prefixes (at the beginning) and/or suffixes (at the end) to modify the end result. Some of the most common roots in medical terminology words include:

BRONCH	airways	Bronchitis = inflammation of the airways
CARCIN/O	cancer	carcinogenic = cancer causing
CARDI/O	heart	pericarditis = heart inflammation
CYTO-	cell	cytotoxic = toxic to the cell
DERMA-	skin	dermatitis = inflammation of the skin
GASTRO	stomach/abdomen	Gastroenteritis = inflammation of the stomach and intestines
GYNE/O	female	Gynecology = branch of medicine related to the female reproductive system
HISTIO-	tissue	histology = study of tissue
HEPATI-	liver	hepatoblastoma = liver cancer

MALIGN-	bad / harmful	malignant = growing, spreading
NEPHRO-	kidney	nephrotoxic = harmful to the kidneys
NEURO-	nerves	neuroblast = an immature nerve cell
ONCO-	mass / tumor	oncology = the study of cancer
OSTEO-	bone / bony tissue	osteosarcoma = bone cancer

Common Medical Prefixes

<u>Prefixes change the meaning</u> of the original word: A prefix (in front of a word) can put an unknown word into perspective.

For example, if a word begins with "aden-" or "adeno-", it should always relate to the glands.

The 50 Most Common Medical Prefixes

Ab-	Away from
Ad-	Toward
Acro-	Top; extremities
Acu-	Sharp; severe
Ante-	Before; forward
Anti-, Anter-	Opposing; against
Bi-	Two; double
Brachio-	Arm
Chemo-	Chemical
Co-, con-, com-	Together; with
Cranio	Skull
Cyto-	Related to cells
De-	Down; from
Di-	Twice; two
Dia-	Throughout
Ecto-	Outside
Encephal/o	Brain
Estro-	Female
Epi-	Upon
Extra-, Extro-	Beyond; outside of
Hemi-	Half; half of
Hemat/o-	Blood
Hyper-	Above; excessive; beyond
Hyp-, Hypo-	Below; beneath; deficient
Inter-	Between
Intra-	Within; inside
Intro-	Into; within
Macro-	Large
Meso-	Middle
Micro-, Micr-	Tiny; small

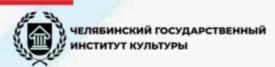|	
Mono/Uni	One; single
Morto-	Death
My/o-	Muscle
Neur/o-	Nerve
Ocul/o-	Eye
Onco-	Tumor
Or-	Mouth
Post-	After; following; behind
Pre-, pro-	In front of; before
Pulmon-	Lungs
Retro-	Behind; backward
Secto-	To cut
Semi-	Half
Stetho-	Chest
Topo-	Place; position
Trans-	Through or across
Tri-	Three
Ultra-	Excessive; beyond

The 50 Most Common Medical Suffixes

Studying medical suffixes is great because there are a lot fewer to memorize than prefixes! Medical suffixes typically indicate whether the word is a procedure, disease, condition, or part of speech (e.g. verb, noun, adjective).

For example, if you hear the word "adenocarcinoma", the "oma" will inform you that a tumor is present. In this case, a cancerous tumor.

Some common medical suffixes include:

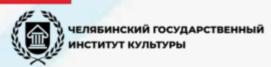|	
-ary	Pertaining to
-ase	Enzyme
-ation	Process
-cele	Hernia
-clasis	To break
-constriction	Narrowing of
-dilation	To expand; stretch
-dynia	Pain; discomfort
-ectomy	Removal
-edema	Swelling; inflammation
-ema	Condition
-emia	Related to blood
-eurysm	Expanding; widening
-genesis	To form
-globin	Protein
-graphy	Recording of something

-ia	Condition
-icle	Small, possibly microscopic
-ism	Process or condition
-itis	Swelling; inflammation
-lysis	Breakdown; deterioration; separation
-mania	Obsession
-mortem	Death
-oma	Mass; tumor; cyst
-one	Hormone
-opsy	Display of
-ostosis	Condition of bone
-paresis	Weakness; failing
-partum	Birth
-pathy	Emotion or disease
-phasia	Speech
-phylaxis	Protection
-poiesis	Formation
-pnea	Breathing
-rrhea	Discharge
-rrhexis	Burst
-schisis	To split
-scopy	Examination
-somnia	Sleep
-spasm	Muscle contraction
-stasis	To control; stop
-stoma/-stomy	Create a new opening
-tomy	Process of cutting; making an incision
-tresia	Opening
-tropia	To turn
-tropin	To trigger
-type	Image, designation
-uria	Urine

When you understand where important medical terms stem from, it's far easier to read patient charts, communicate with members of staff, and expand your knowledge.

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