



Medical Terminology

Root Words, Prefixes & Suffixes — Reference Notes

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1. How Medical Terms Are Built

There are three objectives to keep in mind as you study medical terminology:

- Analyze words by dividing them into component parts.
- Relate the medical terms to the structure and function of the human body.
- Be aware of spelling and pronunciation problems.

Medical terms are made of: Prefix + Root Word + Connecting Vowel + Suffix

Worked Examples

Morphology = Morph/(o) + logy

Root Word: *Morph/o* — meaning shape or form. Suffix: *-logy* — meaning study.

Morphology means study of shape, form, or structure of things.

Xerophthalmia = Xer/o + Ophthalmos + ia

Prefix: *Xer/o* — meaning dry. Root Word: *Ophthalmos* — meaning eyes. Suffix: *-ia* — meaning pertaining to.

Xerophthalmia is a condition pertaining to dryness of eyes. It is generally caused by Vitamin-A deficiency.

Rhinoplasty = Rhin/(o) + plasty

Root Word: *Rhin/o* — meaning nose. Suffix: *-plasty* — surgical repair.

Rhinoplasty means surgical repair of nose.

Thrombophlebitis = Thromb/o + Phleb/o + itis

Prefix: *Thromb/o* — meaning blood clot. Root Word: *Phleb/o* — meaning vein. Suffix: *-itis* — inflammation.

Thrombophlebitis is an inflammation in a vein causing blood to clot, which may cause blocking in veins.

Polyneuritis = Poly + Neur/o + itis

Prefix: *Poly* — meaning many or more. Root Word: *Neur/o* — meaning nerve. Suffix: *-itis* — meaning inflammation.

Polyneuritis is a condition of inflammation in multiple peripheral nerves.

Pericarditis = Peri + card + itis

Prefix: *Peri* — meaning around. Root Word: *Card* — meaning heart. Suffix: *-itis* — meaning inflammation.

Pericarditis means inflammation in the area around the heart.

Hypokalemia = Hypo + Kal/i + emia

Prefix: *Hypo* — meaning low. Root Word: *Kal/i* — meaning potassium. Suffix: *-emia* — meaning condition of blood.

Hypokalemia means loss or low level of potassium in blood. It is a condition that can occur in dehydration and with excessive vomiting and diarrhea. The heart is particularly sensitive to potassium loss.

Hyperglycemia = Hyper + Glyc/o + emia

Prefix: *Hyper* — meaning high. Root Word: *Glyc/o* — meaning sugar. Suffix: *-emia* — pertaining to blood.

Hyperglycemia means condition of high sugar levels in blood.

2. Root Words Reference

The table below lists common medical root words and their meanings.

Term	Meaning	Term	Meaning
Abdomino	Abdomen	Adreno	Adrenal Gland
Adipo	Fat / Fatty Tissue	Histo/Histio	Tissue
Hystero/metro	Uterus	Laryngo	Larynx
Arterio	Artery	Arthro	Articulo (joint)
Brachio	Arm	Bronch	Bronchus
Carcino	Cancer	Cardio	Heart
Cephalo	Head	Cerebello	Cerebellum
Cerebro	Cerebrum	Colo	Colon / Large Intestine

Term	Meaning	Term	Meaning
Cranio	Skull	Cyto	Cell
Cysto	Bladder	Dento	Teeth
Dermo/Dermato	Skin	Duodeno	Duodenum
Encephalo	Brain	Entero	Intestine / Small Intestines
Gastro	Stomach	Lympho	Lymph
Myo	Muscle	Masto/mammo	Breast
Musculo	Muscle	Naso	Nose
Neuro	Nerve	Nephro/rene	Kidney
Oculo/Ophthalmo	Eye	Onco	Tumor / Mass
Oophoro	Ovary	Orchido	Testis
Osteo	Bone	Oto	Ear
Phlebo/veno	Veins	Pneumo/pulmo	Lungs
Procto	Anus / Rectum	Rhino	Nose
Salpingo	Fallopian tubes	Stomato	Mouth
Gingivo	Gums	Glosso/linguo	Tongue
Hemo/emia	Blood	Append/o	Appendix
Appendic/o	Appendix	Bucc/o	Cheeks
Cec/o	Cecum	Thoraco	Chest / Thorax
Thyro	Thyroid Gland	Viscero	Internal Organs
Hepato	Liver	Uvul/o	Uvula
Amyl/o	Starch	Bill/i	Gall / Bile
Celi/o	Belly, abdomen	Chol/e	Gall / Bile
Cheil/o	Lip	Chlorhydr/o	Hydrochloric acid
Cholecyst/o	Gallbladder	Gluc/o	Sugar
Choledoch/o	Common Bile duct	Glyc/o	Sugar
Col/o	Colon	Lip/o	Fat, lipid
Colon/o	Colon	Lith/o	Stone
Duoden/o	Duodenum	Prote/o	Protein
Enter/o	Small Intestine / Intestine	Py/o	Pus
Faci/o	Face	Sial/o	Saliva / Salivary
Ile/o	Ileum	Steat/o	Fat
Jejun/o	Jejunum	Alveol(o)	Pertains to alveolus
Labi/o	Lip	Laryng(o)	Larynx
Lapar/o	Abdomen	Lob(o)	Lobe
Mandibul/o	Lower jaw or mandible	Nas(o)	Nose
Palat/o	Palate	Pleur(o)	Pleura
Peritone/o	Peritoneum	Pneum(o)	Lungs
Pharyng/o	Throat	Rhin(o)	Nose
Proct/o	Anus or rectum	Thorac(o)	Chest
Pylor/o	Pyloric sphincter	Trache(o)	Trachea, windpipe
Sialaden/o	Salivary gland	Adenoid(o)	Adenoid gland
Sigmoid/o	Sigmoid colon	Coni(o)	Dust
Stomat/o	Mouth	Cyan(o)	Cyanosis
Epiglott(o)	Epiglottis	Angi(o)	Vessel
Mediastin(o)	Mediastinum	Vas(o), Vascul(o)	Vessel
Ox(o)	Oxygen	Aort(o)	Aorta
Pector(o)	Chest	Arter(o), Arteri(o)	Artery
Phon(o)	Voice	Arteriol(o)	Arteriole
Phren/o	Diaphragm	Atri(o)	Atrium
Pulmon(o)	Lung	Coron(o)	Crown

Term	Meaning	Term	Meaning
Sinus(o)	Sinus / cavity	Endocardi(o)	Endocardium
Spir(o)	Breathing	Echo(o)	Sound
Thorac(o)	Chest	Son(o)	Sound
Tonsill(o)	Tonsils	Electr(o)	Electricity
Trache(o)	Trachea, windpipe	Fluor(o)	Emitting or reflecting light
Pericardi(o)	Pericardium	Cost(o)	Ribs
Path(o)	Disease	Glomerul(o)	Glomerulus
Radi(o)	Radiant energy or x-ray	Lith(o)	Stone
Sept(o)	Septum, partition	Pyel(o)	Kidney or pelvis
Sin(o)	Sinus	Ren(o)	Kidney
Tom(o)	To cut	Ur(o)	Urine
Ven(o)	Vein	Ureter(o)	Ureter
Venul(o)	Venule	Urethr(o)	Urethra
Valv(o), Valvul(o)	Valve	Urin(o)	Urine
Ventricul(o)	Ventricle	Vesic(o)	Urinary bladder
Dialy-	Dialysis	Ante-	Before
Noct-	Night	Spher/o	Globe, round
Olig-	Few or little	Splen/o	Spleen
Poly-	Much or many	Thromb/o	Clotting
Pyel-	Pelvis or kidney	Thym/o	Thymus gland
Ren-	Kidney	Tox/o	Poison
Bas/o	Base	Acetabul/o	Acetabulum (hip socket)
Coagul/o	Clotting	Ankyl/o	Stiff
Chrom/o	Color	Arthr/o	Joint
Eosin/o	Red, dawn, rosy	Articul/o	Joint
Erythr/o	Red	Burs/o	Bursa (sac in joint)
Granul/o	Granules	Calc/o	Calcium
Hem/o	Blood	Calcane/o	Calcaneus (heel)
Hemat/o	Blood	Carp/o	Carpals (wrist bones)
Hemoglobin/o	Hemoglobin	Chondr/o	Cartilage
Immun/o	Immune, immunity	Clavicul/o	Clavicle (collar bone)
Is/o	Same, equal	Fasci/o	Fascia (forms sheaths enveloping muscles)
Kary/o	Nucleus	Femor/o	Femur
Leuk/o	White	Fibr/o	Fibrous connective tissue
Lymph/o	Lymph, lymph tissue	Fibul/o	Fibula
Lymphaden/o	Lymph, gland, lymph node	Humer/o	Humerus
Mon/o	One, single	Ischi/o	Ischium
Morph/o	Shape, form	Lamin/o	Lamina
Myel/o	Bone marrow	Lord/o	Curve, swayback
Neutr/o	Neutral	Lumb/o	Loins, lower back
Phag/o	Eat, swallow	Malleol/o	Malleolus
Poikil/o	Varied, irregular	Caud-	Tail bone
Sider/o	Iron	Caus/o	Burning
Maxill/o	Maxilla	Cephal/o	Head
Metacarp/o	Metacarpals	Cerebell/o	Cerebellum
Metatars/o	Metatarsals	Cerebr/o	Cerebrum
Olecran/o	Olecranon (elbow)	Cerebral	Brain
Orth/o	Straight	Comat/o	Deep sleep (coma)
Patell/o	Patella (kneecap)	Crani/o	Skull or cranium
Pelv/i	Pelvis (hipbone)	Dendr-	Branches

Term	Meaning	Term	Meaning
Perone/o	Fibula	Dur/o	Dura mater
Phalang/o	Phalanges	Encephal/o	Brain
Plant/o	Sole of the foot	Esthesi/o, -esthesia	Feeling, nervous sensation
Pub/o	Pubis	Gangli/o	Ganglion
Radi/o	Radius	Gli/o	Glial cells
Rhabdomy/o	Skeletal muscle	-Kinesia, -kinesis	Movement
Rheumat/o	Watery flow	Lept/o	Thin, slender
Sarc/o	Muscle and flesh	Medul/o	Medulla oblongata
Scapul/o	Scapula	Mening/o, Meninge/o	Membranes, meninges
Scoli/o	Crooked, bent	Pont/o	Pons
Spondyl/o	Vertebra	Radicul/o	Nerve root
Synov/o	Synovial membrane	Syncop/o	To cut off, cut short
Ten/o	Tendon	Tax/o	Order, coordination
Tendin/o	Tendon	Thalam/o	Thalamus
Tibi/o	Tibia (shin bone)	Thec/o	Sheath
Uln/o	Ulna	Vag/o	Vagus nerve
Vertebr/o	Vertebra	Andr/o	Male
Alges/o, -algnesia	Excessive sensitivity to pain	Balan/o	Glans penis
Cry/o	Cold	Hydr/o	Water, fluid
Crypt/o	Hidden	Orch/o, Orchi/o,	Testis, testicle
Epididym/o	Epididymis	Pen/o	Penis
Gon/o	Seed	Prostat/o	Prostate
Terat/o	Monster	Semin/i	Semen, seed
Sperm/o, Spermat/o	Spermatozoa, semen	Chori/o, Chorion/o	Chorion
Test/o	Testis, testicle	Colp/o	Vagina
Varic/o	Varicose	Episi/o	Vulva
Vas/o	Vessel, duct; vas deferens	Galact/o	Milk
Amni/o	Amnion	Mast/o	Breast
Bartholin/o	Bartholin gland	Men/o	Menses, menstruation
Cervic/o	Cervix, neck	Metr/o, Metri/o	Uterus
Nat/i	Birth	Acous/-	Hearing
Obstetr/o	Pregnancy and childbirth	Albin(o)	White
O/o	Egg	Ambly/-	Dull, dim
Ov/o	Egg	Anthrac(o)	Black
Ovul/o	Egg	Aque/-	Water
Ovari/o	Ovary	Audi/o	Hearing
Perine/o	Perineum	Audit/-	Hearing
Phor/o	To bear	Aur/-, Auricul/-	Ear (see ot/o)
Xer/-	Dry	Bhephar/-	Eyelid
Conjunctiv/-	Conjunctiva	Chlor(o)	Green
Cor/-	Pupil	Cirrh(o)	Tawny yellow
Corne/-	Cornea	Cochle/-	Cochlea
Cutane(o)	Skin	Kerat/-	Cornea
Cyan(o)	Blue	Lacrim/-	Lacral (tears)
Darcry/-	Tears, tear duct	Leuk(o)	White
Cycl/-	Ciliary body or muscle of the eye	Melan(o)	Black or melanin
Dipl/-	Double	Myc(o)	Fungus
Glauc/-	Gray	Retin/-	Retina
Ir/-, Irid/-	Iris	Tympan/-	Eardrum, tympanic membrane
Jaund(o)	Yellow	Adrenal/o	Adrenal gland

Term	Meaning	Term	Meaning
Gonad/o	Sex glands (ovaries and testes)	Pituitar/o	Pituitary gland; hypophysis
Pancreat/o	Pancreatic gland	Thyr/o, Thyroid/o	Thyroid gland
Parathyroid/o	Parathyroid gland	Cortic/o	Cortex, outer region
Crin/o	Secrete	Dips/o	Thirst
Estr/o	Female	Gluc/o	Sugar
Home/o	Sameness	Glyc/o	Sugar
Hormon/o	Hormone	Myx/o	Mucus
Kal/i	Potassium	Natr/o	Sodium
Lact/o	Milk	Somat/o	Body
Ster/o	Solid structure	Toc/o	Child birth
Toxic/o	Poison	Ur/o	Urine

3. Common Prefixes

Term	Meaning	Term	Meaning
a-, an-	No, not, without, away	aut-	Self
brady-	Slow	dia-	Apart, through
end-, endo-	Within, inside	exo-	Outside of, without
epi-	Above	hyper-	Excessive
hypo-	Insufficient	inter-	Between
intra-	Middle	media-	Medium
medial-	Situated or pertaining to the middle	medi-	Middle
medio-	Within	normo-	Normal
per-	Through	peri-	Around
physio-, physi-	Related to nature or physiology	poly-	Many
pro-	Before, for, in front of, from, in behalf of, on	re-	Back, again
retro-	Behind, back, backward	sub-	Under, below, beneath, in small quantity, less
syn-, sy-, syl-, sym-	Union or association	tachy-	Fast
trans-	Across, through, beyond, over	Epiglott-	Epiglottis
Naso-	Nose	Oxi- or oxy-	Oxygen
ultra-	Excess		

4. Common Suffixes

Term	Meaning	Term	Meaning
-ac, -al, -ar, -ary	Pertaining to	-ic	Pertaining to, characteristics
-ose, -ous	Pertaining to	-tic	Pertaining to
-centesis	Surgical puncture to aspirate or remove fluid	-cision	Process of cutting
-ectomy	Excision (surgical removal or cutting out)	-graphy	The process of recording
-ia	Condition	-ism	Condition, process, theory of, principle, method
-itis	Inflammation	-lysis	Process of loosening, freeing, or destroying
-opsy	To view	-osis	Condition, status, process
-otomy	Cutting into	-ostomy	Formation of an opening
-plasty	Surgical repair	-pathy	Disease
-sclerosis	Hardening	-scope	Instrument for viewing
-scopy	Visual examination with a lighted instrument	-sis	State, condition
-stasis	To stand, place, stop, control	-stenosis	Narrowing
-tension	Pressure	-therapy	Treatment
-thoracic	Chest	-ule	Small
-ologist	One who studies	-ology	Study of

Term	Meaning	Term	Meaning
-gram	A drawing or a written record	-megaly	Enlarged, enlargement
-oma	Tumor	-penia	Deficiency
-apheresis	Removal, a carrying away	-blast	Immature cell, embryonic
-gen	Giving rise to, producing	-globin	Protein
-oid	Derived or originating from	-phage	Eat, swallow
-philia	Attraction for	-asthenia	Lack of strength
-clast	To break	-desis	To bind, tie together
-graph	Product of a drawing, writing or recording	-listhesis	Slipping
-malacia	Softening	-physis	To grow
-porosis	Pore, passage	-tome	Instrument to cut
-trophy	Development, nourishment	-algia	Pain
-lepsy	Seizure	-paresis	Weakness
-plegia	Paralysis	-praxia	Action
-arche, -cyesis,	Beginning pregnancy or pregnant	-parous	Bearing, bringing forth
-rrhea	Discharge	-tocia	Labor, birth
-version	Act of turning		