

UNDERSTANDING MEDICAL TERMS

At first glance, medical terminology can seem like a foreign language. But often the key to understanding medical terms is focusing on their components (prefixes, roots, and suffixes). For example, spondylolysis is a combination of “spondylo,” which means vertebra, and “lysis,” which means dissolve, and so means dissolution of a vertebra.

The same components are used in many medical terms. “Spondylo” plus “itis,” which means inflammation, forms spondylitis, an inflammation of the vertebrae. The same prefix plus “malacia,” which means soft, forms spondylomalacia, a softening of the vertebrae.

Knowing the meaning of a small number of components can help with interpretation of a large number of medical terms. The following list defines many commonly used medical prefixes, roots, and suffixes.

a(n)	absence of	cut	skin
acou, acu	hear	cyan(o)	blue
aden(o)	gland	cyst(o)	bladder
aer(o)	air	cyt(o)	cell
alg	pain	dactyl(o)	finger or toe
andr(o)	man	dent	tooth
angi(o)	vessel	derm(ato)	skin
ankyl(o)	crooked, curved	dipl(o)	double
ante	before	dors	back
anter(i)	front, forward	dys	bad, faulty, abnormal
anti	against	ectomy	excision (removal by cutting)
arteri(o)	artery	emia	blood
arthr(o)	joint	encephal(o)	brain
articul	joint	end(o)	inside
ather(o)	fatty	enter(o)	intestine
audi(o)	hearing	epi	outer, superficial, upon
aur(i)	ear	erythr(o)	red
aut(o)	self	eu	normal
bi, bis	double, twice, two	extra	outside
brachy	short	gastr(o)	stomach
brady	slow	gen	become, originate
bucc(o)	cheek	gloss(o)	tongue
carcin(o)	cancer	glyc(o)	sweet, or referring to glucose
cardi(o)	heart	gram, graph	write, record
cephal(o)	head	gyn	woman
cerebr(o)	brain	hem(ato)	blood
cervic	neck	hemi	half
chol(e)	bile, or referring to gallbladder	hepat(o)	liver
chondr(o)	cartilage	hist(o)	tissue
circum	around, about	hydr(o)	water
contra	against, counter	hyper	excessive, high
corpor	body	hypo	deficient, low
cost(o)	rib	hyster(o)	uterus
crani(o)	skull	iatr(o)	doctor
cry(o)	cold		

infra	beneath	phleb(o)	vein
inter	among, between	phob(ia)	fear
intra	inside	plasty	repair
itis	inflammation	pleg(ia)	paralysis
lact(o)	milk	pnea	breathing
lapar(o)	flank, abdomen	pneum(ato)	breath, air
latero	side	pneumon(o)	lung
leuk(o)	white	pod(o)	foot
lingu(o)	tongue	poie	make, produce
lip(o)	fat	poly	much, many
lys(is)	dissolve	post	after
mal	bad, abnormal	poster(i)	back, behind
malac	soft	presby	elder
mamm(o)	breast	proct(o)	anus
mast(o)	breast	pseud(o)	false
megal(o)	large	psych(o)	mind
melan(o)	black	pulmon(o)	lung
mening(o)	membranes	pyel(o)	pelvis of kidney
my(o)	muscle	pyr(o)	fever, fire
myc(o)	fungus	rachi(o)	spine
myel(o)	marrow	ren(o)	kidneys
nas(o)	nose	rhag	break, burst
necr(o)	death	rhe	flow
nephr(o)	kidney	rhin(o)	nose
neur(o)	nerve	scler(o)	hard
nutri	nourish	scope	instrument
ocul(o)	eye	scopy	examination
odyn(o)	pain	somat(o)	body
oma	tumor	spondyl(o)	vertebra
onc(o)	tumor	steat(o)	fat
oophor(o)	ovaries	sten(o)	narrow, compressed
ophthalm(o)	eye	steth(o)	chest
opia	vision	stom	mouth, opening
opsy	examination	supra	above
orchi(o)	testes	tachy	fast, quick
osis	condition	therap	treatment
osse(o)	bone	therm(o)	heat
oste(o)	bone	thorac(o)	chest
ot(o)	ear	thromb(o)	clot, lump
path(o)	disease	tomy	incision (operation by cutting)
ped(o)	child	tox(i)	poison
penia	deficient, deficiency	uria	urine
peps, pept	digest	vas(o)	vessel
peri	around	ven(o)	vein
phag(o)	eat, destroy	vesic(o)	bladder
pharmac	drug	xer(o)	dry
pharyng(o)	throat		