

Medical Vocabulary: Introduction

Medical terms are created based on combinations of Latin or Greek root words and affixes. Prefixes come before the root word and suffixes come after the root word. Below is a chart containing examples of root words and affixes used to create medical terms.

Root Words and Affixes Chart

Prefix	Meaning	Root Word	Meaning	Suffix	Meaning
A-	Absence/without	Arthr	Joint	- algia	Pain
An-	Absence/without	Axill	Armpit	-ectomy	Surgical removal
Brady-	Slow	Cardi	Heart	- gram	Record/x-ray
Dys-	Difficult/ abnormal	Cephal	Head	-itis	Inflammation
Ecto-	Outside/outer	Chol	Bile/gall	-malacia	Softening
Endo-	Within	Chondr	Cartilage	-megaly	Enlargement
Epi-	Outer	Clavicul	Clavicle	-ology	Study of
Hemi-	Half	Col	Colon	-oma	Tumor
Hyper-	Excessive	Cyst	Bladder/sac	-osis	Abnormal condition
Hypn-	Sleep	Derm	Skin	-ostomy	Artificial opening
Hypo-	Under	Enter	Intestines	-pathy	Disease/damage
Infra-	Below	Hemo	Blood	-plasia	Growth
Intra-	Within/through	Hepat	Liver	-plasm	A growth
Meta-	Beyond /change	Hyster	Uterus	- plasty	Surgical repair
Myo-	Of the muscle	Mamm	Breast	- plegia	Paralysis
Neo-	New	Men	Menstruation	- pnea	Breath
Peri-	Outer/around	Nephr	Kidney	- rhaggia	Fast flow
Poly-	Many	Neur	Nerve	- rhea	Flow
Sub-	Under	Onc	Tumor	-scopy	Visual exam
Super-	Over	Oste	Bone	-sclerosis	Hardening
Supra-	Above	Pneumon	Lung	-stasis	Control/stop
Tachy-	Fast	Splen	Spleen	-trophy	Growth/nourishment

Combining Vowels

Combining vowels are used to link medical terms together. They ease the transition from one word to another, making it more fluid. The vowel 'o' is used most, but others such as 'e' are also used.

Examples:

Cholecystectomy = removal of the gallbladder

Chol: bile e: combining vowel cyst:bladder ectomy:removal

Hepatomegaly = enlargement of the liver

Hepat: liver o:combining vowel megaly: enlargement

Vocabulary Exercises

Exercise I

Use the Root Words and Affixes chart to:

- 1) Decide whether the terms below describe a symptom or disease, or a procedure or specialty
- 2) Guess what these terms mean.
Fill in the chart below with your answers.

Term	Symptom/Disease	Procedure/Specialty	Guessed Meaning
Neuropathy	X		Disease of the nerves
Cystoscopy			
Mammoplasty			
Pericarditis			
Nephrology			
Arthralgia			
Achondroplasia			
Pathology			
Colostomy			
Menorrhagia			
Pneumectomy			

- 3) Go over your answers with a partner. Compare your definitions and discuss how you decided on them. You might want to change some of your answers after your discussion.

Once you have filled in the chart, check your answers on the Web using the links to the Medical Terminology Glossary and the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary.

Exercise II

Use the Root Words and Affixes chart to:

1) Decide which root words, prefixes and/or suffixes you think would be combined to describe the following conditions:

Condition	Prefix	Root Word	Suffix	Guessed term
Disease of the nerves		Neur-	pathy	Neuropathy
A type of liver tumor				
Inflammation of the kidneys				
Excessive (tissue) growth				
Nerve pain				
Absence of the menstrual flow				
Enlargement of the spleen				
Softening of the bones				
Skin inflammation				
Inflammation of the inner lining of the heart chambers				

2) Discuss your answers with your partner. Once you have filled in the chart, check the Web to see if you guessed correctly. Use the links to the Medical Terminology Glossary and the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, and any other sites you find useful