

Understanding medical terms

The vocabulary of medicine is vast. The following lists will assist in understanding some of the terms used in the reports produced by medical experts. No responsibility for loss occasioned to any person acting or refraining from action as a result from any information in the material can be accepted by Stewart House.

There are three lists supplied

1. Prefix and suffix list
2. Commonly used abbreviations
3. Abbreviations used in prescribing notation

To use the prefix and suffix list follow the principle of how words are built up. Most medical words are made up from a series of

building blocks. The generic terms for the building blocks are PREFIX, WORD ROOT and SUFFIX. If you know what each of the building blocks mean, you can build up the definition of the word.

Here is an example:

Hypo/glyc/aemia

The prefix **HYPO** means below or under

The word root **GLYC** means sugar

The suffix **AEMIA** means a condition of blood

Therefore the word means a condition of below normal levels of sugar in the blood.

Prefix, suffix and word root list

A	
a, an	without, not
ab-	away from
acanth/o	spiny
acro-	extremities, point
actin/o	sun/ray
ad-	towards
aden/o	gland
adenoid/o	adenoid
adren/o	adrenal gland
adrenocortic/o	adrenal cortex
-aemia	condition of blood
aer/o	air/gas
aesthesio/	sensation

af-	towards/near
-agogenic	pertaining to/including
-agogue	agent which induces/promote
algesi/o	sense of pain
-algia	condition of pain
alveol/o	alveoli (of lungs)
amni/o	amnion/fetal membrane
ana-	backward/apart
andr/o	male
aneurysm/o	enlarging/swelling/dilation
angi/o	vessel
aniso-	unequal
ante-	before/in front
anter/o	front

Abbreviations used in Prescribing Notation

Please note some abbreviations have more than one meaning. Not all the meanings are listed here. It is important to consider the context in which the abbreviation is used to establish if the definition is appropriate.

anti-	against
antr/o	antrum/maxillary sinus
aort/o	aorta
-apheresis	removal
apo-	away
aponeur/o	aponeurosis (flat tendon)
appendic/o	appendix
aqua-	water
-arche	beginning
arter/i	artery
aretri/o	artery
arthr/o	joint
ather/o	porridge, plaque lining blood vessel
audi/o	hearing
-aural	pertaining to the ear
aur/i	ear
-axis	increase
axill/o	armpit
azot/o	urea/nitrogen

B

balan/o	glans penis
bartholin/o	Bartholin's glands of vagina

baso-	basic/alkaline
bi-	two
bin-	two each/double
blast/o	early growth /development
-blast	germ cell/embryonic / immature
blenn/o	mucus
blephar/o	eyelid
brachi/o	arm
brady-	slow
bronch/i	bronchus/windpipe
bronchiol/o	bronchiole
bronch/o	bronchus/windpipe
bucc/o	cheek
burs/o	bursa

C

calc/i	calcium
calcin/o	calcium
cancer/o	cancer (general term)
carcin/o	cancerous /malignant (tumour)
card/i	heart
cardia	heart condition

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cardi/o	heart	cister/o	cistern/enclosed space (sub arachnoid space)
carp/o	carpal/wrist bones	-clasis	breaking
-cele	swelling /protrusion/hernia	-clast	a cell which breaks
-centesis	surgical puncture to remove fluid	clavicul/o	clavicle
cephal/o	head	-clysis	infusion/injection /irrigation
cerebr/o	cerebrum/brain	cochle/o	cochlea
cervic/o	cervix	col/o	colon
-chalasis	slackening /loosening	colon/o	colon
cheil/o	lip	colp/o	vagina
chem/o	chemical	conjunctiv/o	conjunctiva
chol/e	bile	contra-	against/opposite
choledoch/o	common bile duct	-concus	cone-like protrusion
chondr/o	cartilage	cor/o	pupil
chori/o	chorion/outer fetal membrane	core/o	pupil
choroid/o	choroid	cortic/o	cortex
chromat/o	colour	cost/o	rib
-chromia	haemoglobin /condition of colour	crani/o	skull
-cide	something that kills	-crit	separate
cine/o	movement/motion	crur/o	leg
cinemat/o	movement motion	crypt/o	hidden
circum-	around	culd/o	cul-de-sac/ recto uterine pouch
		cycl/o	ciliary body

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-cysis	pregnancy
cyst/o	bladder
-cyte	cell
cyt/o	cell

dynam/o	force
-dynia	condition of pain
dys-	difficult/painful

D

dacry/o	tear/lacrimal apparatus
derm/a	skin
dermat/o	skin
-desis	fixation/bind together by surgery
dextro-	right
di-	two/double
dia-	through
-dialysis	separate
digit/o	finger/toe
dipl/o	double
disc/o	intervertebral disc
dist/o	far
diverticul/o	diverticulum
dorso-	back (of body)
duoden/o	duodenum
dur/o	dura mater

E

ec-	out/outside
echo-	reflected sound
ect-	out/outside
-ectasis	dilatation, stretching
-ectomy	removal, excision
ef-	out of/away from
electro-	electrical
ellipto-	shaped like an ellipse
em-	in
embol/o	embolus/plug/blockage
emmetr/o	in due measure
-emphraxis	blocking/stopping up
en-	within/in
encephal/o	brain
endo-	within, inside
endometri/o	endometrium of uterus (lining)
enter/o	intestine (often small intestine)

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epi-	above/upon/on
epididym/o	epididymis
epiglott/o	epiglottis
epilept/i	epilepsy
epilept/o	epilepsy
-erysis	drag/draw/suck out
erythro/o	red
eu-	good
ex-	out/out of away from
exo-	out/away from
-externa	external
extra-	outside

F

faci/o	face
femor/o	femur/thigh
fer/o	to carry/to bear
fet/o	foetus
fibr/o	fibre
fibul/o	fibula
fluor/o	fluorescent/luminous
-form	having form of
-fuge	agent that suppresses/gets rid of

G

galact/o	milk
gangli/o	ganglion
-ganglion	ganglion
gastr/o	stomach
-genesis	capable of causing/ pertaining to formation
-genic	pertaining to formation/ originating in
gen/o	produced by
gingiv/o	gum
-globin	protein
-globulin	protein
glomerul/o	glomerulus of kidney
gloss/o	tongue
glyc/o	sugar
glycos	sugar (obsolete variant of glucose)
gnath/o	jaw
goni/o	angle/corner
-grade	to go
-gram	X-ray/tracing recording
-graph	usually recording instrument/X-ray or tracing

Abbreviations used in Prescribing Notation

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-graphy	technique of recording/ making X-ray
granul/o	granule/granular
-gravida	pregnancy/pregnant woman
gynaec/o	woman
-gyric	pertaining to circular motion

H

-haemia	blood condition
haem/o	blood
haemat/o	blood
	haemoglobin
hallux	great toe
helc/o	ulcer
hemi-	half
hepat/o	liver
hepatic/o	hepatic bile duct
hidro/o	sweat/perspiration
histi/o	type of macrophage (histiocyte)
hist/o	tissue
humer/o	humerus
hydr/o	water
hyper-	above/excessive

hypo-	below/under
hyster/o	uterus/womb

I

-ia	condition of
-iac	pertaining to
-iasis	abnormal condition
-iatr	medical treatment/doctor
ichthy/o	dry/scaly/fish like
ile/o	ileum
ili/o	ilium/flank
immun/o	immune
in-	in/into
infer/o	inferior
infra-	below/inferior to
insulin/o	insulin
inter-	between
-interna	internal
intra-	within/inside
ir/o	iris
irid/o	iris
isch/o	holding back/reducing

Abbreviations used in Prescribing Notation

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ischi/o	ischium
-ism	process
ios-	same/equal
-ist	specialist
-itis	inflammation
-ium	structure

J

jejun/o	jejunum
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K

kal/i	potassium
kerat/o	horny/epidermis/cornea
ket/o	ketones
-kinesis	movement
kinesi/o	movement
kinet/o	movement
-kymia	condition of involuntary twitching of muscle
kyph/o	crooked/hump

L

labi/o	lip
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labyrinth/o	labyrinth of ear
lacrim/o	tear/tear ducts/lacrimal apparatus
lact/i	milk
lact/o	milk
laevo-	left
-lalia	condition of talking
lamin/o	lamina/thin plate/part of vertebral arch
lapar/o	abdomen/flank
-lapaxy	empty/wash out/evacuate
laryng/o	larynx
later/o	side
lei/o	smooth
leiomy/o	smooth muscle
lept/o	thin/fine/slender
leuc/o	white
leuk/o	white
-ligation	tying off a vessel with a suture
lingu/o	tongue
lith/o	stone
-lith	stone
-lithiasis	abnormal condition of stones

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lob/o	lobe
-logist	specialist who studies
-logy	study of
lord/o	bend forward
Lutein	yellow
lymph/o	lymph
lymphaden/o	lymph gland
lymphangi/o	lymph vessel
-lytic	pertaining to breakdown
-lysis	breakdown/disintegration

megal/o	abnormally large
-megaly	enlargement
melan/o	melanin/dark pigment
menisc/o	meniscus
mening/i	membranes of (CNS)
mening/o	membranes of (CNS)
men/o	menses/menstruation/ monthly low
meso-	middle
meta-	change in for/position, beyond
metacarp/o	metacarpal
metatars/o	metatarsal
-meter	measuring instrument
-metrist	person who measures
metr/o	uterus/womb
-metry	process of measuring
micro-	small
mono-	one/single
motor	moving/action/set in motion
morph/o	shape/form
muscul/o	muscle
multi-	many
myc/o	fungus

M

macro-	large
-malacia	conditioning of softening
malle/o	hammer/malleus (ear ossicle)
mamm/o	breast/mammary gland
man/o	pressure
mastoid/o	nipple-shaped/mastoid process
maxill/o	maxilla
medi-	middle
-media	middle
mega-	abnormally large

Abbreviations used in Prescribing Notation

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myel/o	bone marrow/spinal cord
my/o	muscle
myocardi/o	myocardium
my (myein)	to close/squint
myring/o	ear drum/tympanic membrane

N

narc/o	stupor/numbness
nas/o	nose
nat/o	birth
natr/i	sodium
necr/o	death
neo-	new
nephr/o	kidney
neur/o	nerve (rarely tendon)
neutr/o	neutral
nulli-	none

O

obstetric-	pertaining to midwifery
ocul/o	eye
odont/o	tooth

-oedema	swelling due to fluid
oesophag/o	oesophagus/gullet
oestr/o	oestrogen
-oid	resembling
olig/o	deficiency/few/little
-olithesis	slipping
-oma	tumour/swelling
onc/o	tumour
onych/o	nail
oo/o	egg (note oo is always the combining form used)
oophor/o	ovary
ophthalm/o	eye
ophthalmos	eye
opt/o	vision/eye
-opia	condition of vision/defective vision
opistho-	backward
-opsia	condition of vision/defective vision
optic/o	vision/eye/optic nerve
or/o	mouth
orchi/o	testis
orchid/o	testis

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orth/o	straight
os	bone/oral cavity
-osis	abnormal condition/disease of
ossicul/o	ear ossicles/bones
oste/o	bone
-otic	condition of, disease of/ pertaining to condition
ot/o	ear
-ous	pertaining to
ovari/o	ovary

-paresis	slight paralysis
patell/o	patella/knee cap
-pathia	condition of disease pathic pertaining to disease
path/o	disease
-pathy	disease
-pause	stopping
-penia	condition of lack of/ deficiency
ped/o	foot
pelv/i	pelvis
per-	through
peri-	around
pericardi/o	pericardium
perine/o	perineum
peritone/o	peritoneum
petr/o	stone/rock
-pexy	surgical fixation/fix in place
phac/o	lens
phag/o	eating/consuming
-phagia	condition of eating
phak/o	lens
phalng/o	phalange/finger/toe
phall/o	penis

P	
pachy	thick
paed/o	child
palat/o	palate
palm/o	palm
pan-	all
pancreat/o	pancreas
pancreatic/o	pancreatic duct
papill/o	nipple-like/optic disc
para-	beside/near
-para	to bear/bring forth offspring
parathyroid/o	parathyroid gland



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pharyng/o	pharynx	pleur/o	pleural membranes
-phasia	condition of speaking/ speech	plex/o	network of nerves, blood or lymph vessels
phleb/o	vein	pneum/a	gas/air (lung)
-phobia	condition of fear	pneumat/o	gas/air (lung)
phon/o	sound/voice	pneum/o	gas/air, also lung
-phonia	condition of having voice	pneumon/o	lung/air
phren/o	diaphragm	pnoea	breathing
-phthisis	wasting away	-poiesis	formation
-phyma	tumour/boil	poikil/o	varied/irregular
-physis	growth	polio-	grey matter (of the CNS)
-phyte	plant/fungus	pollex	thumb
phyt/o	plant (fungus)	poly-	many
-phil	loving/affinity for	por/o	passage/pore
pil/o	hair	port/o	portal vein
pituitar-	pituitary gland	post-	after/behind
placent/o	placenta	poster/o	back of body/behind/ posterior
-plasia	condition of growth/ formation of cells	posth/o	prepuce/foreskin
plasma-	liquid part of blood	pre-	before/in front of
plasm/o	anything moulded, shaped or formed	preputi/o	prepuce (foreskin of penis)
-plasty	surgical repair/ reconstruction	presbyo-	old man/old age
-plegia	condition of paralysis	primi-	first
		pro-	before

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proct/o	rectum/anus
progets/o	progesterone
prostat/o	prostate gland
prosth/o	adding (replacement part)
proxim/o	near
pseudo-	false
psych/o	mind
-ptosis	falling/displacement/ prolapse
ptyal/o	saliva
pulmon/o	lung
pupill/o	pupil
pyel/o	pelvis/trough of kidney
pylor/o	pylorus
py/o	pus

Q

quadri-	four
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R

rachi/o	spine
radic/o	nerve root
radicul/o	nerve root

radi/o	radiation/X-ray/radius
re-	back
ren/o	kidney
retin/o	retina
rect/o	rectum
reticul/o	net-like (immature erythrocyte)
retro-	backwards/behind
rhabdomy/o	striated muscle
rhin/o	nose
roentgen/o	X-ray
-rrhage	bursting forth of blood/ bleeding
-rraghia	condition of bursting forth of blood/bleeding
-rrhaphy	suture/stitch
-rrhexis	reak/rupture
-rrhoea	excessive/discharge

S

salping/o	Eustachian tube/fallopian tube
sarc/o	fleshy/connective tissue
sarcomat/o	sarcoma (malignant tumour)

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scapul/o	scapula
-schisis	cleaving/splitting/parting
schiz/o	split/cleft
scint/i	spark/flash of light
scler/o	sclera (white of eye)/hard
-sclerosis	hardening
scoli/o	crooked/twisted
-scope	instrument to view
-scopy	visual examination
-scopist	specialist who uses viewing instrument
scot/o	darkness
scotoma-	scotoma/blind spot
scrot/o	scrotum
seb/o	sebum
-sect (ion)	cut
secundi-	second
semin/i	semen
septic/o	sepsis/infection/putrefaction
ser/o	serum
sial/o	saliva/salivary glands
sigmoid/o	sigmoid colon/resembling an S

sin/o	sinus
sinus-	sinus
sinus/o	sinus
somat/o	body
son/o	sound
-spadia	condition of drawing out
-spasm	involuntary contraction of muscle
sperm/i	sperm
sperm/o	sperm
spermat/o	sperm
sphygm/o	pulse
spir/o	to breathe
splen/o	spleen
spondyl/o	vertebra
stapedi/o	stirrup/stapes (ear ossicle)
-stasis	stopping/controlling/cessation of movement
-static	pertaining to stopping/controlling
-staxis	dripping/a dropping
sten/o	narrow/constricted
stern/o	sternum
steth/o	chest/breast

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stomat/o	mouth
-stomy	to form a new opening or outlet
sub-	under
super/o	superior/above
supra-	above
-synechia	condition of adhering together
synovi/o	synovial fluid/membranes
syring/o	tube/cavity

-thermy	heat
thorac/o	thorax
-thorax	thorax
thromb/o	thrombus/clot
thrombocyt/o	platelet
thym/o	thymus
thymic/o	thymus
thyr/o	thyroid gland
thyroid/o	thyroid gland
tibi/o	tibia
toc/o	labour/birth
-tome	cutting instrument
tom/o	slice/section
-tomy	incision into
-tonia	condition of tension/tone prolonged contraction
ton/o	stretching/tension/tone
tonsill/o	tonsil
-toxic	pertaining to poison
tox/o	poison
trache/o	trachea
trachel/o	neck
trans-	across
-trauma	injury/wound

T	
tachy-	fast
tars/o	tarsus
tax/o	ordered movement
-taxia	condition of ordered movement
tendin/o	tendon
tend/o	tendon
ten/o	tendon
tenont/o	tendon
tetra-	four
-therapy	treatment
therm/o	heat

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trich/o	hair
trigon/o	trigone
-tripsy	art of crushing
-triptor	instrument designed to crush or fragment
-trite	instrument designed to crush or fragment
- -trophy	nourishment/development
-tropic	pertaining to affinity for stimulating/changing in response to a stimulus
tympan/o	tympanic membrane/middle ear

U

uln/o	ulna
ultra-	beyond
-uresis	excrete in urine/urination
ureter/o	ureter
urethr/o	urethra
-uria	condition of urine/urination
urin/a	urine
ur/o	urine/urinary tract
uter/o	uterus
uve/o	uvea (pigmented parts of eye)

uvul/o	uvula
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V

vagin/o	vagina
valv/o	valve
valvul/o	valve
varic/o	dilated veins/varicose veins
vas/o	vessel
vascul/o	vessel
ven/o	vein
venacav/o	vena cava/great vein
ventricul/o	ventricle
ventro-	belly side of body
-version	turn
vesic/o	bladder
vesicul/o	seminal vesicle
vestibul/o	vestibule of inner ear
vol/o	palm
vulv/o	vulva

X

xanth/o	yellow
xer/o	dry