

Chapter 4: Medical Terminology

Objectives

1. Define the key terms listed at the beginning of this chapter.
2. Identify basic word elements individually and within medical terms.
3. State the meanings of common word roots, prefixes, and suffixes and identify unique plural endings.
4. State the meanings of medical terms composed of elements found in this chapter.
5. Demonstrate proper pronunciation of medical terms by using the general pronunciation guidelines found in this chapter.

Objectives (cont' d)

6. State the meanings of common medical abbreviations listed in this chapter.
7. Identify items currently on the Joint Commission's "Do Not Use" list and the list of items for possible future inclusion on the "Do Not Use" list.

Word Roots

- The subject of a medical term
- Foundation on which term is built
- Typically indicates tissue, organ, body system, color, condition, substance, or structure

Example:

Word Root	Meaning	Example	Meaning
Thromb	To clot	Thrombosis	Condition of clotting

Prefixes

- A word element that comes before a word root
- Modifies meaning of word root by adding information, such as presence, absence, location, number, or size

Example:

Prefix	Meaning	Example	Meaning
A-	Without	Anuclear	Without a nucleus

Suffixes

- A word ending
- Follows a word root & changes or adds to its meaning
- To determine meaning of a medical term, first identify the meaning of the suffix.

Example:

Suffix	Meaning	Example	Meaning
-ic	Pertaining to	Gastric	Pertaining to the stomach

Combining Vowels/Forms

- A vowel (often “o” or “i”) added between 2 word roots or a word root & a suffix to make pronunciation easier
- A word root combined with a vowel is a combining form.
- Not needed if a suffix begins with a vowel

Example:

Word Root	Comb. Vowel	Suffix	Comb. Form	Word & Meaning
Path	o	-logy	Path/o	Pathology: the study of disease

Discrepancies in the Classification of Word Elements

- Texts vary in how they classify word elements of medical terms
- Some word elements may be classified one way in one term & a different way in another

Example:

Word Root	Comb. Vowel	Suffix	Word & Meaning
Path	o	-logy	Pathology: the study of disease
My	o	-pathy	Myopathy: disease of the muscle

Unique Plural Endings

Word Ending	Plural Ending	Singular Example	Plural Example
-a	-ae	Vena cava	Vena cavae
-en	-ina	Lumen	Lumina
-ex, -ix	-ices	Appendix	Appendices
-is	-es	Crisis	Crises
-nx	-nges	Phalanx	Phalanges
-on	-a	Protozoan	Protozoa
-um	-a	Ovum	Ova
-us	-i	Nucleus	Nuclei

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Pronunciation

- Pronunciation & spelling can affect meaning.
- Basic English pronunciation rules apply to most terms.
- Some terms may have more than one acceptable pronunciation; for example, hemophilia can be pronounced:
 “he mo fil’ e a” or “hem o fil’ e a”
- Some terms that are spelled differently are pronounced the same; for example, *illum*, which means “hipbone,” is pronounced the same as *ileum*, which means “small intestine.”

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Abbreviations and Symbols

- Used to save time, space, & paperwork
- Abbreviation: a way of shortening words or phrases
- Symbol: object or sign that represents word or phrase

Examples:

ABO, CSF, ICU, MCH, STAT, Trig

+, -, =, > #, @, &

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The Joint Commission’s “Do Not Use” List

- Minimum list of dangerous abbreviations, symbols, & acronyms
 - Abbreviations that can lead to medical errors
- For example, “IU” can be mistaken for “IV” or “10”
 Personnel must write “international unit,” instead.

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