

Commonly Encountered Medical Terms

Abrasions- The skin or mucous membrane; rubbing or scraping of the surface layer of cells or tissue from an area by friction.

Abcess – A cavity containing pus, surrounded by inflamed tissue, a result of localized infection.

Acute – A condition beginning abruptly with sharp or severe intensity, then subsiding shortly after.

Anaphylactic Shock – A severe, sometimes fatal systemic hypersensitivity reaction to a substance, a drug, vaccine, food, serum, allergen, venom or chemical.

Anemia – A decrease in hemoglobin in the blood levels to below normal range.

Apnea – Abnormal periods when breathing stops.

Arterial – Of or pertaining to an artery (leads to the heart).

Asthma – Recurring attacks of breathlessness, characteristically accompanied by wheezing when breathing out and varying in severity from day to day.

Benign – Not endangering health or life; not malignant.

Blood Gas – A test for determining the pH and concentrations of oxygen, carbon dioxide, nitrogen, and bicarbonate in the blood.

Blood Sugars – The concentration of glucose in the blood.

Bowel Sounds – A rumbling sound made by the movement of gas in the intestine.

Bronchopulmonary Dysplasia (BPD) – A chronic lung condition that is caused by tissue damage to the lungs, marked by inflammation exudate (substance discharged from), scarring, fibrosis, emphysema, usually occurring in immature infants who have received mechanical ventilation and/or supplemental oxygen as treatment for respiratory distress syndrome.

Bradycardia – Slowness of the heart, manifested in a pulse rate usually less than 60 beats per minute.

Cardiovascular – The system which includes the heart and blood vessels.

Cerebral Palsy (CP) – A disability resulting from damage to the brain before, during, or shortly after birth and outwardly manifested by muscular incoordination and speech disturbances.

Cerebrospinal Fluid (CSF) – The fluid that flows through and protects the ventricles, brain, and spinal canal.

Chronic – A condition developing slowly and persisting for a long period of time (often lifetime condition).

Circulation – The movement of blood through the vessels of the body that is induced by the pumping action of the heart and serves to distribute nutrients and oxygen to and remove waste products from all parts of the body.

Cleft - Divided; a fissure.

Cognition/Cognitive – The mental process characterized by knowing, thinking, learning, and judging.

Colostomy – Surgical formation of an artificial anus by connecting the colon to an opening in the abdominal wall.

Congenital – Present at birth.

Contractures – Shrinkage of scar tissues, connective tissues, or shortening of the muscles and tendons, producing distortion or deformity.

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) – In respiratory therapy; ventilation assisted by a constant air flow delivered throughout the respiratory cycle.

Chest Percussion Therapy – Systematic pounding on the chest in order to loosen chest congestion.

Cutaneous – Of or pertaining to the skin.

Cutdown – An incision into a vein to insert a catheter for intravenous infusion.

Dehydration – An excessive loss of water from the body tissues.

Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) No Code – A written order by a qualified physician instructing not to attempt to resuscitate a particular patient in the event of cardiac or respiratory failure; usually only written for patients that are gravely ill, death is imminent, or death is inevitable.

Diagnosis - Identification of a disease or condition by scientific evaluation.

Discharge – To release a substance or object.

Distended – To be swollen from a force within.

Edema – Excessive accumulation of fluid in the tissue spaces; swelling.

Elimination – Bodily discharges including urine, feces, and vomit.

Emesis – Medical term for vomit.

Epilepsy – A neurological disorder characterized by recurrent seizures; uncontrolled electrical discharge from the nerve cells of the cerebral cortex (in the brain).

Extremity – A limb of the body; the distal or terminal end; (ex.: a human hand or foot).

Febrile – Feverish or related to fever or rise in normal body temperature.

Fissure – A cleft or groove on the surface of an organ.

Fistula – An abnormal passage from an internal organ to body surface or between two internal organs.

Flaccid – weak, soft, flabby, relaxed; lacking normal muscle tone.

Fontanels/Fontanel – One of the two soft areas on a baby's scalp, a membrane-covered gap between the bones of the skull.

Fusion – The act of uniting or cohering; bringing together into a single entity; uniting two or more bones.

Gag Reflex – A normal reflex elicited by touching the soft palate or back of the tongue.

Gastrointestinal – Part of digestive system that consists of the mouth, esophagus, stomach, intestine, and anus.

Gastrostomy Tube (G-tube) – A latex or plastic tube inserted in a surgical opening in the stomach to provide nourishment.

Hemiparesis – Muscular weakness or partial paralysis affecting one side of the body only.

Hemoglobin – The oxygen-carrying pigment found in the red blood cells, carries oxygen to lungs and other body tissues.

Hemorrhage – A rapid loss of a large amount of blood externally or internally.

Hereditary – Pertaining to a characteristic, condition, or disease transmitted from the parent.

Hernia – The abnormal protrusion of an organ or a part through the containing wall of its cavity.

Hydrocephalus – Abnormal accumulation of cerebrospinal fluid in the ventricles within the skull cavity causing increased pressure.

Hyper – Combining form meaning: excessive, above, or beyond.

Hypo – Combining form meaning: under, beneath, of deficient.

Hypoglycemia – Low level of glucose in the blood.

Hypotonia – Excessive limpness in any body part.

Ileostomy – Surgical formation of an artificial anus by connecting the ileum to an opening in the abdominal wall, through which fecal matter is emptied.

Immunosuppressed – When the immune response is reduced or absent.

Input – Amount of fluids put into the body.

Insulin – A hormone that regulates the level of glucose in the blood.

Intubation – Passage of a tube into the trachea to provide an open airway.

Irritability – Showing signs of being fretful, fussy, touchy and sensitive.

Jejunal Tube (J-tube) – Artificial opening made through the abdomen into the jejunum (part of the small intestine) where a small latex or plastic tube is placed to provide nourishment.

Juvenile Diabetes – An inability to metabolize carbohydrate caused by an overt insulin deficiency; occurring rapidly in children, eventually leading to a dependency on insulin.

Ketoacidosis – Complication of diabetes, an accumulation of ketones in the body, that results from by products of fat metabolism when glucose is not available for a fuel source in the body.

Labile – Unstable; characterized by a tendency to change rapidly.

Laceration – A torn and ragged wound.

Lethargy – The state or quality of being indifferent, apathetic, or sluggish.

Leuko – Combining form meaning: of or pertaining to a white corpuscle (blood cell).

Local – limited to a part or place; not generalized.

Malignant – Tending to infiltrate, metastasize, become worse and cause death.

Meningitis – Any infection or inflammation of the membranes covering the brain or spinal cord.

Mental Retardation (MR) – Below average intellectual ability that is equivalent to or less than an IQ of 70, occurs during the developmental period, and is manifested especially by abnormal development, cognitive impairment and problems in social adjustment.

Metabolic – Of or pertaining to metabolism (all chemical processes in living organisms).

Mobility – The ability to move independently.

Musculoskeletal – Involving all muscles and bones in the human body.

Myelomeningocele – Spina-bifida; developmental defect of the central nervous system in which a hernial sac containing a portion of the spinal cord, its meninges (membranes), and CSF through a congenital cleft in the spinal column.

Nebulizer – A device to produce a fine aerosol spray for dispersing liquid (saline, albuterol....)

Necrosis – Localized tissue death.

Neurology – The scientific study of the nervous system especially in respect to its structure, functions, abnormalities, and disorders.

Nasogastric Tube (NG – tube) – A tube passed in through the nose to the stomach to provide nourishment or suction excess gastric fluids out.

Nystagmus – Involuntary, rhythmic, oscillatory movements of the eyes.

Obturator – A device used to block a passage or canal or fill in the space.

Obstruction – A condition of being clogged or blocked.

Occipital – Of or pertaining to the occiput (the back of the head).

Ocular – Of or pertaining to the eye.

Ophthalmologist – A branch of medical science dealing with the structure, functions, and diseases of the eye.

Optic – Combining form meaning: of or pertaining to the eye, sight ,or vision.

Oral – Of or pertaining to the mouth.

Ortho – Combining form meaning: straight, normal, correct.

Osteo – Combining form meaning: of or pertaining to the bone.

Ostomy – Surgical procedure where an opening is made to allow passage.

Otic-/Ot- - Combining form meaning: of or pertaining to the ear.

Output – Total amount of fluid removed or emptied from the body.

Paralysis/Paralyses – Abnormal condition characterized by loss of muscle function, tone, or sensation.

Patent – The condition of being open and unblocked.

Peak Flow – To perform peak expiratory flow rate (PEFR) assessments.

Percutaneous – Procedure performed through the skin.

Peripheral – Of or pertaining to the outside, surface, or surrounding area.

Prognosis – A prediction of the probable outcome of a disease.

Prone – Lying face down on the stomach.

Pulse – A rhythmical beating or vibrating movement of blood corresponding to heart beat, usually counted at the wrist.

Reactive Airway Disease (RAD) – irritant-induced asthma.

Rales – Airflow with abnormal moisture, heard when listening to lungs during inspiration.

Renal – Of or pertaining to the kidney.

Reflux – Abnormal backward flow of fluids.

Respiration – Single complete act of breathing including inhale and exhale.

Resuscitation – Process of sustaining the vital functions during respiratory or cardiac failure.

Retractions – Visible sinking of the soft tissues of the chest area with increased breathing effort.

Rhonchi – Abnormal sounds of airway caused by thick secretions, spasm, or pressure; a rumbling sound more pronounced during expiration that can clear with a cough.

Rigidity – A condition of hardness, stiffness, or inflexibility.

Rupture – A tear or break in an organ or body tissue.

Seclusion – The isolation of a patient to decrease harmful stimuli.

Scoliosis – Lateral curvature of the spine.

Secretions – Releasing some material either functionally specialized (as saliva) or isolated for excretion (as urine).

Sedation – Induced state of quiet, calmness, or sleep by means of hypnosis or medication.

Spina – Bifida – A congenital cleft of the spinal column with hernial protrusion of the meninges and sometimes the spinal cord.

Stridor – An abnormal, high-pitched, musical respiratory sound caused by an obstruction.

Suctioning – To remove fluid from a body cavity or passage by suction device.

Supine – Lying face up, on the back.

Syndrome – Signs, symptoms resulting from a common cause, presenting a clinical picture.

Tepid – Moderately warm to the touch.

Terminal – A structure or process; near or approaching the end.

Tidal Volume – Volume of air that passes in and out of the lungs in an ordinary breath.

Thermometer – Instrument for measuring temperature.

Topical – Of or pertaining to the surface of the skin.

Total Parenteral Nutrition (TPN) – Nutrition administered by vein or parenteral (not through the digestive system).

Toxicity – The degree to which something is poisonous.

Tracheostomy – An opening (incision) made through the tissue of the neck into the trachea.

Traction – The process of putting a limb, bone, or muscle under tension using weights to align, immobilize, or relieve pressure.

Transfusion – Introduction into the blood stream of whole blood or components of blood.

Transplant – To transfer an organ or tissue from one person to another.

Trauma – Physical or mental injury.

Tremor – Rhythmic, purposeless, quivering movements.

Tumor – A new growth of cells or tissues characterized by growth that is free of the laws of development of the body it grows in.

Ulcer – A crater like lesion of the skin or mucous membrane with an inflamed base.

Unconscious – Unaware of surroundings, incapable of responding to sensory stimuli.

Urethra – small tubular structure that drains urine from the bladder.

Urinary – Of or pertaining to urine or urine formation.

Urticaria – An allergic disorder marked by raised edematous patches of skin or mucous membrane and usually by intense itching and caused by contact with a specific precipitating factor (as a food, drug, or inhalant) either externally or internally.

Uvula – Small, cone-shaped process suspended in the back of the mouth.

Vaccination – Inoculation with any organism to produce immunity against a specific disease.

Ventricle – Small cavity or pouch; fill with CSF in the brain, there are also right and left ventricles in the heart.

Ventricle Peritoneal Shunt (VP Shunt) – Silicone tubing with valve device that diverts CSF from the ventricle in the brain to the peritoneal cavity in the abdomen.

Vertigo – The sensation that the outer world is revolving about the patient or that he himself is moving in space.

Voluntary – Pertaining to an action or thought as a result of a person's free will or choice.

Volume – The amount of space a substance fills.

Wheeze – A whistling or sighing noise produced in the act of breathing. It signifies partial obstruction of one or more of the air passages due to spasm, edema, inflammation, foreign body, tumor, or external pressure.