

Introduction to Medical Terminology

Medical Term: fundamentals

- Most medical terms are derived from Greek and Latin language, which means that two different roots may have the same meaning, e.g. dermatos (Greek word) and the cutane (Latin word) both refer to the skin.
- A medical word consists of some or all of the following elements:
 - Medical roots
 - Combining Form
 - Prefix
 - Suffix

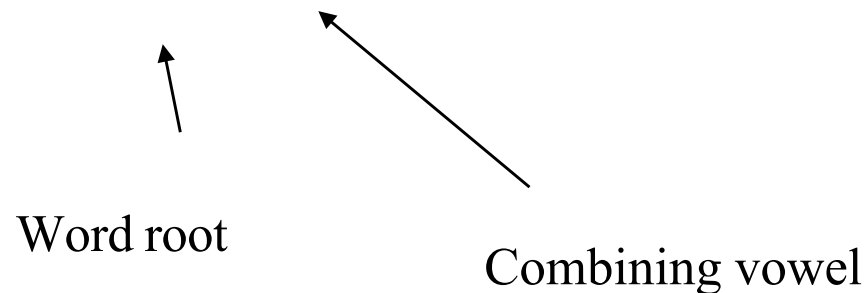
1-Term Root

- It is the main part of the medical term and which carries its primary meaning (Greek roots are used for building up the words that describe a disease, condition, treatment, or diagnosis, while, Latin roots are used to build up words that describe anatomical structures).
- It can appear at the beginning of a word, after a prefix, before a suffix, or between a prefix and a suffix.
- All terms have at least one word root.
- A word root may be used alone or combined with other elements to form a complete word.
- Examples of Medical roots
 - “stomat” means mouth (Greek) “or” means mouth (Latin)
 - “dermat” means skin (Greek) “cutane” means skin (Latin)
 - “nephr” means kidney (Greek) “ren” means kidney (Latin)

2- Combining Form

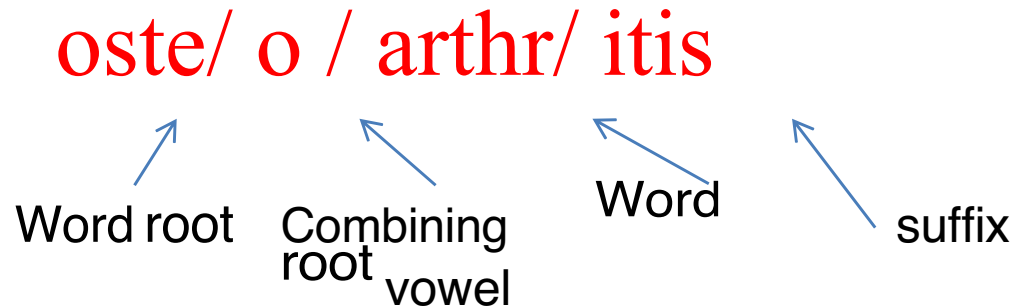
- A **combining form** is the combination of the word root and the combining vowel which could be an o, but sometimes it is an i to make the word roots pronunciation easier.
- The combining vowel has no meaning of its own, but enables two word elements to be connected.
- A combining form is presented as word root/vowel (such as gastr/o).

i.e. gastr / o pronounced GASTRO.



- When a word has more than one root, a combining vowel is used to link the root to each other.

i.e. osteoarthritis



Examples of Combining Forms

This table illustrates how word roots and vowels create combining forms. Learning combining forms rather than word roots makes pronunciation a little easier because of the terminal vowel. For example, in the table below, the word roots gastr and nephr are difficult to pronounce, whereas their combining forms gastr/o and nephr/o are easier to pronounce.

Word Root	+	Vowel	=	Combining Form	Meaning
erythr/	+	o	=	erythr/o	red
gastr/	+	o	=	gastr/o	stomach
hepat/	+	o	=	hepat/o	liver
immun/	+	o	=	immun/o	immune, immunity, safe
nephr/	+	o	=	nephr/o	kidney
oste/	+	o	=	oste/o	bone

3- Suffix

- A suffix (derived from Greek or Latin words) is composed of one or more letters added to the END of a word root or combining form to modify its meaning, it describes a pathology (disease or abnormality), symptom, surgical or diagnostic procedure, or part of speech.

Examples of Suffixes

This table lists examples of pathological suffixes as well as their phonetic pronunciations. Begin learning the pronunciations as you review the information below.

Combining Form	+	Suffix	=	Medical Word	Meaning
gastr/o (stomach)	+	-itis (inflammation)	=	gastritis gās-TRĪ-tīs	inflammation of the stomach
	+	-megaly (enlargement)	=	gastromegaly gās-trō-MĒG-ă-lē	enlargement of the stomach
	+	-oma (tumor)	=	gastroma gās-TRŌ-mă	tumor of the stomach
	+	-itis (inflammation)	=	hepatitis hĕp-ă-TĪ-tīs	inflammation of the liver
hepat/o (liver)	+	-megaly (enlargement)	=	hepatomegaly hĕp-ă-tō-MĒG-ă-lē	enlargement of the liver
	+	-oma (tumor)	=	hepatoma hĕp-ă-TŌ-mă	tumor of the liver

Building Medical Words

There are three basic rules for building medical words.

Rule I

A word root links a suffix that begins with a vowel.

Rule II

A combining form (root + o) links a suffix that begins with a consonant.

Rule III

A combining form links a root to another root to form a compound word. This rule holds true even if the next root begins with a vowel, as in osteoarthritis.

Keep in mind that the rules for linking multiple roots to each other are slightly different from the rules for linking roots and combining forms to suffixes.

Rule 1

Word Root	+	Suffix	=	Medical Word	Meaning
hepat liver	+	-itis inflammation	=	hepatitis hĕp-ă-TĪ-tĭs	inflammation of the liver

Rule 2

Combining Form	+	Suffix	=	Medical Word	Meaning
hepat/o liver	+	-cyte cell	=	hepatocyte HĔP-ă-tō-sīt	liver cell

Rule 3

Combining Form	+	Word Root	+	Suffix	=	Medical Word	Meaning
oste/o (bone)	+	chondr cartilage	+	-itis inflammation	=	osteochondritis ōs-tē-ō-kŏn-DRĪ-tĭs	inflammation of bone and cartilage
		arthr joint	+	-itis inflammation	=	osteoarthritis ōs-tē-ō-ăr-THRĪ-tĭs	inflammation of bone and joint

Meanings of certain suffixes

-scope (instrument to view)

-rrhexis
(rupture)

-rrhea (excessive flow or discharge)

-stenosis (narrowing, stricture)

-pathy (disease)

-toxic (poison)

(All begin with a consonant, therefore a combining vowel must be used between the word root and the suffix.)

-algia (pain) -edema (swelling)

-uria (urine, urination) -osis (abnormal condition)

-ectomy (excision)

These suffixes begin with a vowel, therefore a combining vowel is NOT used between the word root and the suffix.

4- Prefix

- A prefix is a syllable or syllables attached to the beginning of a word or word root to alter its meaning or create a new word.
- Not all medical terms have a prefix.
- The prefix usually indicates a number, time, position, direction, or negation, absence). Many of the same prefixes used in medical terminology are also used in the English language.

Anti- (against) Hyper-
(excessive) Pre-
(before)
Post- (after) Homo-
(same) Hypo-
(under)
Hetero- (different) Eu-
(normal) Dys-
(painful) Brady-
(slow

Epi- (above) hemi-
(half) bi- (two)
tri- (three) mono-
(one) Hypo- (under)
para- (beside) Intra – (
within) Endo- (within)
Ecto – (outside)

Epi- (above)) inter-
(between) retro-
(behind) macro-
(large) micro- (small)
multi- (much) ab-
(away from) ad – (
within) Endo- (toward)
circum– (around

Examples of Prefixes

This table lists examples of prefixes as well as their phonetic pronunciations. Begin learning the pronunciations as you review the information below.

Prefix	+	Word Root	+	Suffix	=	Medical Word	Meaning
an- (without, not)	+	esthes (feeling)	+	-ia (condition)	=	anesthesia ăn-ēs-THĒ-zē-ă	condition of not feeling
hyper- (excessive, above normal)	+	therm (heat)	+	-ia (condition)	=	hyperthermia hī-pēr-THĒR-mē-ă	condition of excessive heat
intra- (in, within)	+	muscul (muscle)	+	-ar (pertaining to)	=	intramuscular în-tră-MŪS-kū-lăr	pertaining to within the muscle
para- (near, beside; beyond)	+	nas (nose)	+	-al (pertaining to)	=	paranasal păr-ă-NĀ-săl	pertaining to (area) near the nose
poly- many, much	+	ur (urine)	+	-ia (condition)	=	polyuria pōl-ē-Ū-rē-ă	condition of much urine

Changing Prefixes and Meanings

In this table, each word has the same root, nat (birth) and suffix, -al (pertaining to). By substituting different prefixes, new words with different meanings are formed.

Prefix	+	Word Root	+	Suffix	=	Medical Word	Meaning
pre- (before)	+		+		=	prenatal prē-NĀ-tāl	pertaining to (the period) before birth
peri (around)	+	nat (birth)	+	-al (pertaining to)	=	perinatal pēr-Ī-NĀ-tāl	pertaining to (the period) around birth
post (after)	+		+		=	postnatal pōst-NĀ-tāl	pertaining to (the period) after birth

Medical term Interpretation

It can be done by defining the term components (1- suffix, or last part of the word, 2- the first part of the word (which may be a word root, combining form, or prefix), 3- the middle parts of the word.

Examples:

Acrocyanosis

Acr (word root = extremities)

cyan (word root = blue)

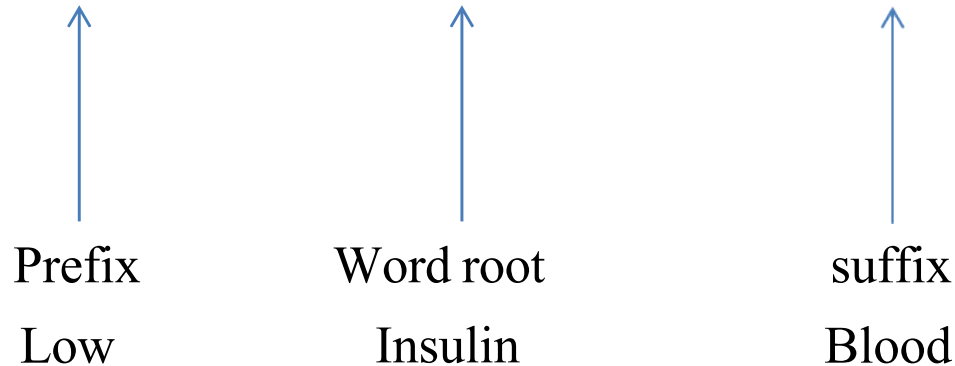
/ o / = combining vowel

- osis (suffix = condition)

So, Acrocyanosis = a condition characterized by blue extremities

Hypoinsulinemia

Hypo / insulin / emia



In this example, there is no combining vowel in this word because the prefix ends with a vowel and the suffix begins with a vowel.

Plural words

Are formed by adding or substituting another vowel or syllable at the end of a word (i.e. suffix.

Examples

- macula – the plural is maculae
- adenoma – the plural is adenomata
- glomerulus – the plural is glomeruli
- ovum – the plural is ova
- spermatozoon – the plural is spermatozoa

Rules for Singular and Plural Suffixes

This table presents common singular suffixes, the rules for forming plurals, and examples of each.

Rule		Example	
Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
-a	Retain <i>a</i> and add <i>e</i> .	pleura	pleurae
-ax	Drop <i>x</i> and add <i>ces</i> .	thorax	thoraces
-en	Drop <i>en</i> and add <i>ina</i> .	lumen	lumina
-is	Drop <i>is</i> and add <i>es</i> .	diagnosis	diagnoses
-ix	Drop <i>ix</i> and add <i>ices</i> .	appendix	appendices
-ex	Drop <i>ex</i> and add <i>ices</i> .	apex	apices
-ma	Retain <i>ma</i> and add <i>ta</i> .	carcinoma	carcinomata
-on	Drop <i>on</i> and add <i>a</i> .	ganglion	ganglia
-um	Drop <i>um</i> and add <i>a</i> .	bacterium	bacteria
-us	Drop <i>us</i> and add <i>i</i> .	bronchus	bronchi
-y	Drop <i>y</i> and add <i>ies</i> .	deformity	deformities

Eponyms

Eponyms are medical terms derived from the name of a person. Many procedures and tests are also named after the person who invented or perfected them.

Examples of diseases;

- Addison's disease
- Cushing's disease
- Stokes-Adam's syndrome
- Alzheimer's disease
- Parkinson's disease

Examples of body parts;

- Bowman capsules
- Wernicke's center or area
- Cowper's glands

Examples of tools;

- Foleys catheter
- Hegar dilators

Acronyms

Acronyms are medical abbreviations. They are used very frequently in medicine. They boost efficiency as long as they are used intelligently.

Examples;

- ACE ----- angiotensin converting enzyme
- ACTH ----- adrenocorticotropic hormone
- AIDS ----- acquired immune deficiency syndrome
- HDL ----- high density lipoprotein
- Hx ----- history
- MI ----- myocardial infarction
- RBC ----- red blood cells
- RBBB ----- right bundle branch block
- TB ----- tuberculosis
- ADH ----- anti-diuretic hormone