



Glossary: Plain Language Versions of Commonly Used Medical Terms

Here is a list of commonly used words medical terms “translated” into plain language. Try using the plain language terms when writing or speaking with clients.

Abnormal: outside the normal range; not normal

Abstinence: not having sex

Adequate: enough

Adolescence: teenage years

Adverse (reaction): bad

Anemia: a lower than normal level of red blood cells or iron

Annual: every year; yearly

Anorexia: not eating over a long period of time

Antibiotic: a drug that kills germs in the body

Assistance: help

Asymptomatic: showing no signs of being sick

Anxious: nervous, worried

Benign: will not cause serious harm; is not cancer

Chronic: always; does not end; constant; ongoing, a lifelong or long term illness

Clinician: doctor; nurse; a person trained in medicine

Continuously: always

Contraceptive: a way to keep from getting pregnant

Culture (lab procedure): test

Dermatologic: related to skin

Detected: found

Diagnose: find the cause of your illness

Directed: told by your doctor or nurse

Discard: throw away

Evaluate: test, check

Expel: to get rid of

External: outside of the body

Genital: around or on the vagina or penis

Gestational: related to or caused by pregnancy

Immunization: a shot to keep you from getting sick in the future

Implantation: set in; plant; attach

Indicator: sign

Infection: a type of sickness that can be passed to other people; a disease that can spread

Initial: first, beginning, starting

Infectious: can be passed from person to person; spreading

Infertility: not able to become pregnant

Insert: put into, stick in, enter

Malignant: able to cause serious harm or death

Minimize: make small

Monitor: watch, keep track of

Occasionally: at times

Penetrate: go in; break through

Pharmacy: drug-store

Potentially: that might be

Prenatal: before the birth of a baby; during pregnancy

Presently: now; at this time

Primary: main

Prior to: before

Promote: help, support

Proper: correct, right

Recreational Drug: street drug (provide examples)

Recur: happens again

Shall: must

Substance Abuse: using drugs and/or alcohol too much

Tablets: pills

Tearing: weepy, watering (eyes)

Temporary: for a short time, for a little while

Teratogenic: harmful to an unborn baby

Sometimes you are required to use a specific medical term. In this case, use the term followed by a definition. If the word is very long, consider providing a pronunciation (Pro-nun-see-AY-shun) guide. When describing parts of anatomy, you should consider using a picture in addition to the text.

Cervix: a name for the bottom part of the uterus, or womb

Pap smear: a test that takes a small sample of the cervix to check for cancer

Menopause: the time in a woman's life when she stops having her periods and can no longer get pregnant

Osteoporosis (say: AH-stee-oh-poor-OH-sis): softening of bones

Ovaries: part of the female reproductive health system; where a woman's eggs are made

Penis: the body part that a man's semen and urine come out of

Scrotum: the pouch of skin that holds the testicles

Testicles: part of the male body where sperm is made

Uterus: where babies grow during pregnancy; also called the womb

Vagina: the opening of a woman's body that leads to the cervix and uterus; where a penis would enter a woman during sex between a man and a woman; a baby goes from the uterus through the vagina when it is born.

