

Medspeak In Plain Language

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Many Americans have questions about **breast cancer**. You may be one of them! You may read newspapers or magazines. You may listen to the radio or watch TV. You may search the Internet. Often, you find special words that doctors and nurses use. These are hard to understand so we call them “medspeak.”

The Medical Library Association wants to help you figure out “medspeak” terms. We wrote this to make it easier to understand what a doctor or nurse tells you. Inside you'll find tips on how to understand many health words. You will also learn how to find good health sites on the web.

This resource was developed in conjunction with MLA's Cancer Librarians Section, MLA members who work in cancer libraries and promote the continued development of cancer information resources and services.

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Quality information for improved health
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Translated into plain language
by Carolyn Paul, AHIP

Rx Riddles Solved!

Doctors, pharmacists and others use a medical “shorthand.” What difference does it make if your doctor’s handwriting isn’t legible? It might mean the difference between AP and ap!

āā	- ana, so much of each
a.c.	- ante cibum, before meals
ad effect	- until effective
ad lib	- as much as desired
AP	- ante partum, before childbirth
ap	- ante prandium, before dinner
aq	- aqua, water
bid	- bis in die, twice each day
ċ	- cum, with
dbl	- double
h.s.	- hora somni, at bedtime
i.d.	- idem, the same
IM	- intramuscular
k	- constant
mb	- misce bene, mix well
MDR	- minimum daily requirement
MED	- minimum effective dose
npo	- nil peros, nothing by mouth
ō	- nono, without
O.D.	- oculus dexter, right eye
O.S.	- oculus sinister, left eye
p̄	- post, after
per os	- by mouth
prn	- pro re nata, as needed
qh	- quaque hora, every hour
qid	- quater in die, four times each day
qv	- quantum vis, as much as you wish
Rx	- recipe, prescription
STAT	- statim, immediately
sum	- sumat, let it be taken
T or T°	- temperature
t	- time
tid	- ter in die, three times each day
ut dict	- ut dictum, as directed
vid	- see
w	- weight
w/	- with
X	- unknown factor

Deciphering Breast Cancer Medspeak

A **ABSCCESS** – pus formed in the body to fight germs that cause infection

AREOLA – dark tissue around the nipple

ASPIRATION – use of a syringe or needle to take fluid from a lump or cyst

ATYPICAL LOBULAR HYPERPLASIA (ALH) – condition in which cells that do not look normal grow in the breast glands that make milk; it is not cancer, but the chance of getting breast cancer, later may be greater if you have ALH

AVERAGE RISK (FOR BREAST CANCER) – chance of getting breast cancer for people who do not have any risk factors for the disease

B **BENIGN** – not cancer

BENIGN BREAST CHANGES – changes in the breast that may cause pain or lumpiness, but they are not cancer and do not kill you; some changes (such as fibrocystic disease and swollen breasts) may increase the chance of getting breast cancer

BIOPSY – taking out a small amount of body tissue to test or look at under a microscope to diagnose or find out what the problem is

BRCA1 AND BRCA2 GENES – genes that control growth of cells in the breast; when they do not work right, they may increase the chance of getting breast cancer

BREAST DENSITY – describes the type and amount of tissue in the breast; a dense breast (common in young women) has less fatty tissue; a mammogram of dense breasts may be harder to read or interpret so a doctor may suggest an ultrasound, which uses sound waves

BREAST IMPLANTS – sacs placed in the breast and filled with a substance such as saline or silicone; used to reconstruct or replace the breast after a mastectomy

BREAST SELF-EXAMINATION (BSE) – a check by a woman of her own breasts; women should know how their breasts feel and report any change to a health care provider as soon as it is found

For more information, call 1.800.227.2345 or visit www.cancer.org.

C **CALCIFICATIONS** (also called microcalcifications) – small amounts of calcium that build up in the breast and can only be seen on a mammogram; they may be an early sign of breast cancer

CANCER – a malignant tumor

CARCIN – part of a word meaning cancer; **CARCIN** in the word carcinogen means “things that cause cancer”

CARCINOMA – another name for cancer

CARCINOMA IN SITU – cancer that has not yet spread into other tissues

CHEMOPREVENTION – use of drugs or vitamins to (1) prevent cancer in someone who is at risk of getting cancer or (2) prevent cancer from coming back in someone who has been treated for the cancer

CLINICAL BREAST EXAM – a physical exam of the breast, underarm, and collarbone area, done by a health care provider, to check for lumps

COMPUTED TOMOGRAPHY (CT)

SCANNING – X-rays linked to a computer to view cross-sections (slices) of the body

COMPUTER-AIDED DETECTION (CAD) – use of a computer program to take a second look at a mammogram film to find abnormal areas after the radiologist has made a first look

CORE NEEDLE BIOPSY – use of a needle to take out tissue to look at under a microscope

CYCLIC BREAST CHANGES – normal tissue changes in the breast during the menstrual cycle; tenderness, swelling, or pain may occur

CYST (in breast) – a small sac or mass in your body that fills with fluid

D **DIAGNOSTIC MAMMOGRAM** – use of an X-ray to check for breast cancer after finding a lump or other sign of possible disease

DIGITAL MAMMOGRAPHY – use of a computer to record X-ray images of the breast

DUCTAL CARCINOMA IN SITU (DCIS) – cells in the breast duct that are not normal; they do not spread but may lead to breast cancer if not taken out

DUCTS – tubes or channels that carry body fluids; breast ducts (mammary glands) bring milk to the nipple

E **EXCISIONAL BIOPSY** – a biopsy that tries to take out the whole lump or suspicious tissue area to test or look at under a microscope

F **FALSE NEGATIVE** (mammograms) – a wrong result of a breast X-ray that shows cancer is not there when in fact, it is

FALSE POSITIVE (mammograms) – a wrong result of a breast X-ray that shows cancer is there when in fact, it is not

FAT NECROSIS – lumpy fat tissue that may form in the breast after surgery, radiation, or a bruise or punch in the chest area

FIBROADENOMA – a firm lump in the breast that moves around when touched but is not painful and is not cancer

FIBROCYSTIC DISEASE – lumps or cysts in one or both breasts; they may be painful or uncomfortable but it is not cancer

G **GENERALIZED BREAST LUMPINESS** – see fibrocystic disease

H **HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY (HRT)** – drugs made up of hormones used to offset the effects of menopause

HORMONES – chemicals made in the body by endocrine glands that are sent into the blood to control cells and organs in other parts of the body

HYPERPLASIA – abnormal increase in the number and growth of normal cells

I **INCISIONAL BIOPSY** – a biopsy that takes out part of a lump or suspicious tissue area to test or look at under a microscope

INFILTRATING CANCER – cancer that has spread beyond where it first started

INTRADUCTAL PAPILLOMA – a benign (not cancer) tumor that looks like a wart and starts in the duct of a breast; if there is more than one, there may be a chance of getting breast cancer

INVASIVE CANCER – see infiltrating cancer

L **LOBES** (also called lobules, bulbs) – part of the breast that makes milk

LOCAL RECURRENCE – cancer that has come back in the same place where it first started

LOCALIZATION BIOPSY – use of mammography to find cancer tissue so it can then be taken out to test or look at under a microscope

LUMPECTOMY – surgery to take out only the breast lump that has cancer

LYMPH NODES – small glands in many places in the body that remove cell waste and fight infections. Some breast cancers may spread to the lymph nodes under a woman’s arm.

M **MALIGNANT** – a harmful condition; a malignant tumor is one that continues to grow

MAMMARY DUCT ECTASIA – ducts under the nipple fill with fluid; this may be painful, but it is not cancer.

MAMMOGRAM – X-ray exam of the breast

MASTECTOMY – surgery to remove all or part of the breast usually because there is cancer

MASTITIS – a bacterial infection in the breast that mainly affects nursing mothers

MENOPAUSE – time in a woman’s life when her menstrual period stops, usually between the ages of 45 and 55

n **NEEDLE BIOPSY** – a biopsy using a needle to take out tissue or fluid from the breast to test or look at under a microscope; there is less scarring and costs less than surgery

NIPPLE DISCHARGE – fluid that is not milk comes out of the nipple

NONPALPABLE CANCER – cancer in the breast that can only be seen on a mammogram and not felt by physical exam

O **ONCOLOGIST** – a doctor who takes care of patients with cancer

ONE-STEP PROCEDURE – an operation in which both a biopsy and surgery are done

P **PALPATION** – pressing the fingers on the skin to feel tissue and organs under the skin

PATHOLOGIST – a doctor who identifies disease by looking at cells or tissue under a microscope

POSITRON EMISSION TOMOGRAPHY (PET SCAN) – X-ray test used to find cancer using radioactive glucose (sugar), which gets picked up by cancer cells as it goes through the body

PROPHYLACTIC MASTECTOMY (preventive mastectomy) – surgery to remove a breast that is not known to have cancer to reduce the risk of getting the disease later

R RADIATION ABSORBED DOSE (RAD) – a unit of measure for radiation

RADIATION THERAPY – use of high-energy rays (radiation) to damage, shrink, or kill cancer cells

RADIOACTIVE GLUCOSE – radioactive sugar put into the blood; because cancer cells use more glucose than normal cells, cancer shows up more in a PET scan

RADIOLOGIST – a doctor with special training in the use of X-rays and imaging scans

RISK FACTORS (FOR CANCER) – something that increases a person’s chance of getting cancer such as family history, smoking, or a previous breast biopsy that was not normal

S SCLEROSING ADENOSIS – a benign (not cancer) condition with increased, abnormal growth of scar-like tissues in the breast’s lobes

STEREOTACTIC LOCALIZATION BIOPSY – use of a 3D X-ray to find a suspicious area and then do a needle biopsy

T TAMOXIFEN – a common hormonal drug used to treat breast cancer or reduce the risk of a high-risk patient getting cancer

TISSUE – cells that look alike and work together for a common task

TUMOR – any growth of tissue that is not normal; it can be benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer)

TUMOR MARKERS – substances in the blood, urine, or tissues that when found at higher than normal levels may mean there is cancer

X X-RAY – a high-energy form of radiation used to take a very precise photo of a part of the body

Diagnosing Breast Cancer Websites

MLA finds the following websites particularly useful for understanding breast cancer.

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org

Website features: news, information on types of cancer, patient services, treatment options, sections on children with cancer and living with cancer, and cancer statistics.

Association of Cancer Online Resources

www.acor.org

Website features: links to cancer listservs, resources, cancer topics, treatment options, clinical trials, and publications.

Breastcancer.org

www.breastcancer.org

Website features: tips for lowering risk, information on symptoms and diagnosis, news and research, library of terms, interactive discussion lists, treatment options, and downloadable brochures.

Cancer Care

www.cancercare.org

Website features: online support groups, telephone education workshops, resources, links to support, educational, treatment, and information services.

National Cancer Institute

www.cancer.gov/cancertopics

Website features: information on types of cancer; treatment options; clinical trials; genetics, causes, risk factors, and prevention; testing; and coping and support resources.

Intercultural Cancer Council

www.iccnetwork.org

Website features: cancer statistics and fact sheets about minorities and underserved populations, news, and resource links.

Oncolink

www.oncolink.org

Website features a collection of Internet resources on the prevention and treatment of cancer maintained by the Abramson Cancer Center of the University of Pennsylvania, includes news, book reviews, and disease and patient support links.

Foundation for Women's Cancer

www.foundationforwomenscancer.org

Website features: the types of cancer that affect women, cancer risks for women, and a search engine to locate gynecologic oncologists, it includes links to related sites, publications, and support groups.

MLA's Cancer Librarians Section website contains tips on evaluating websites and a list of patient cancer libraries in the United States and Canada.

www.selu.com/cancerlib/

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