

Medspeak In Plain Language

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Many Americans have questions about eye disease. 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.

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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 Eye Disease

Medspeak

A **ACCOMMODATION** – change in the shape of the lens of the eye to adjust for close or distance vision

ACUITY – clear, sharp vision

AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION (AMD) – disease in older adults that slowly destroys central vision, which is needed to see objects clearly and to read, drive, etc.; vision is blurry

AMBLYOPIA (also called lazy eye or lazy eye blindness) – the decrease or loss of sight in one eye due to not using that eye as when young; if not treated early, the strong eye gets stronger and the weak eye may be useless

ASTIGMATISM – blurry vision due to a cornea or lens that is not as round as it should be; may be corrected with glasses, contacts or surgery if it is severe

B **BLEPHARITIS** – swelling of the eyelids with redness and itching

C **CATARACTS** – clouding of the eye's lens

CHALAZION – a small bump or cyst on the eyelid due to swelling of the meibomian gland, usually on the upper eyelid

COLOR BLINDNESS – not able to tell one color from another, usually red, green, and blue

COMPUTER VISION SYNDROME (CVS) – blurred vision or hard to focus after looking at a computer screen for a long time; eye drops, glasses, contacts, or other treatments may help

CONJUNCTIVA – clear membrane that covers the sclera (white part of the eye) and the inside of the eyelid

CONJUNCTIVITIS (also called pink eye) – swelling of the conjunctiva; symptoms may include pain, redness, itching, and discharge.

CORNEA – strong, clear top layer of the front of the eye that lets in light and helps the eye to focus

CORNEAL DYSTROPHY (also called Fuch's dystrophy) – an inherited weak cornea that may result in a slow loss of vision

CORNEAL ULCER – open sore on the cornea that may be due to bacteria or irritation caused by a small particle such as sand

D **DETACHED RETINA** – the retina pulls away from the back of the eye

DIABETIC RETINOPATHY – damage to the blood vessels in the retina due to diabetes

DRY EYE SYNDROME – a common problem when the eye does not have enough tears to keep wet and is often the result of aging, drugs, or even windy or dry weather

E **ECTROPION** – a droopy eyelid, often due to aging and usually in the lower eyelid

EPISCLERITIS – swelling of the episclera, a membrane that covers the sclera (white part of the eye)

F **FARSIGHTEDNESS** – when objects far away are clear but close objects are blurry

FLOATERS – very small pieces of the vitreous that break off and float across the eye; floaters are more likely in people who are older, very nearsighted, or diabetic or had cataract surgery

FOVEA – the center of the macula and the point of sharpest vision in the eye

G **GLAUCOMA** – eye diseases with increased pressure on the optic nerve; if not treated, it can distort vision, damage the optic nerve and cause permanent vision loss

H **HORDEOLUM** – see definition for “sty”

HYPEROPIA – see “farsightedness”

I **IRIS** – the colored part of the eye that helps control how much light enters the eye

IRITIS – swelling of the iris which may lead to scarring inside the eye and glaucoma. Symptoms include pain, and redness and may be sensitive to light

K **KERATITIS** – swelling of the cornea

L **LASER-ASSISTED IN SITU KERATOMILEUSIS (LASIK)** – surgery with a laser that reshapes the cornea to improve vision

LENS – clear part of the eye behind the iris that focuses light on the retina

M **MACULA** – part of the retina of the eye that lets you see fine detail

MEIBOMIAN GLAND – oil glands that, along with tears, keep the eye wet

MYOPIA – see nearsightedness

N **NEARSIGHTEDNESS** – when objects close up are clear but distant objects are blurry

O **OPHTHALMOLOGIST** – medical doctor who treats the eye and can do surgery

OPTIC NEURITIS – swelling of the optic nerve

OPTICIAN – person trained to make and fit glasses or contacts

OPTOMETRIST or doctor of optometry – treats diseases of the eye and prescribes glasses or contacts but cannot do surgery

P **PERIORBITAL CELLULITIS** – infection of the tissue around the eye

PRESBYOPIA – hard to see small print or in dim light, due to aging

PROPTOSIS (also called exophthalmos) – one or both eyes bulge forward in their socket; may be caused by Graves' disease or other conditions

PTOSIS – also called “droopy eyelids”

PUPIL – the center of the eye, the black circle inside the iris (colored part of the eye)

R **RETINA** – surface (membrane) at the back of the eye that is sensitive to light and sends images from the lens to the brain

RETINAL ARTERY OCCLUSION – blockage in the blood vessels that go to the retina due to diseases such as diabetes or hypertension

RETINOPATHY – damage to the blood vessels of the retina due to high blood pressure or diabetes. Retinopathy of prematurity (ROP) may be found in very low weight premature babies.

RUBEOSIS – when some blood vessels in the eye get bigger because other blood vessels weaken due to disease

S SCLERA – the white of the eye

SCRATCHED CORNEA – eye injury by a foreign object such as a speck of dirt, common in contact lens wearers. They heal in about fourteen days when treated by a doctor.

STRABISMUS –when the eyes are not aligned, often called cross-eyed

STY – a small lump, similar to a pimple, on the edge or inside of the eyelid

SUBCONJUNCTIVAL HEMORRHAGE – a red spot in the white part of the eye due to a break in a tiny blood vessel. They may not be painful or serious, but a doctor should check to be sure there is no other problem.

T TEMPORAL OR GIANT CELL ARTERITIS– swelling of blood cells in the eyes and scalp, most common in women older than sixty

U UVEITIS – swelling of the uvea, the middle part of the eye that includes the iris and blood vessels

V VITREOUS HUMOR – clear gel that fills the eyeball

Diagnosing Eye Disease Websites

The Medical Library Association (MLA) finds the following websites particularly useful for understanding eye disease.

National Eye Institute (U.S. National Institute of Health)

www.nei.nih.gov/health/

Website features: clinical studies, statistics, fact sheets, news and events, an interactive eye diagram, and a cataract resource guide.

MEDLINEplus from the National Library of Medicine

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/eyediseases.html

Website features: overviews, latest news, diagnosis/symptoms, treatment, prevention, and research.

Women's Eye Health Task Force

www.womenseyehealth.org/

Website features: facts for women, causes of vision loss, eye basics, and prevention and care.

American Foundation for the Blind

www.afb.org/

Website features: living with vision loss, information for seniors and kids, eye conditions, blindness statistics, and Spanish translations.

The Consumer and Patient Health Information Section (CAPHIS) of MLA evaluates websites based on the following criteria: credibility, sponsorship/authorship, content, audience, currency, disclosure, purpose, links, design, interactivity, and disclaimers. See the consumer health library directory at caphis.mlanet.org/consumer/.

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