

Medspeak In Plain Language

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Many Americans have questions about heart 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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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
c̄	- 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 Heart Disease

Medspeak

A ACE INHIBITORS – Angiotensin converting enzyme (ACE) Inhibitors are drugs used to treat heart problems or high blood pressure; they help keep blood vessels open so blood flows easier and the heart doesn't work so hard

ANGIOGRAPHY – X-ray exam of blood vessels in which a colored dye is put in your blood to see blood flow and see if there are any blockages.

ANGIOPLASTY – a way to treat blocked or diseased arteries in which a catheter (tube) with a small balloon at the tip is put in the artery; the balloon is blown up to compress the fatty tissue and widen the artery for better blood flow

ANGIOTENSIN – a chemical made by the body that causes blood vessels to narrow and blood pressure to increase

ARRYTHMIA – a heartbeat that is not normal (too fast, too slow, irregular, early)

ARTERY – a blood vessel that carries blood away from the heart to all parts of the body

ATRIAL FIBRILLATION – a chaotic rhythm of the heart that causes the two upper chambers of the heart (atria) to beat rapidly and irregularly; it can cause an increased risk of blood clots and stroke

ATRIUM – the upper, smaller heart chambers (left and right) that get the blood that is coming back to the heart

B BETA BLOCKERS – drugs used to treat high blood pressure; they help the heart beat slower and more gently

BLOOD THINNERS – drugs used to prevent blood clots

BLOOD VESSELS – stretchy tubes (arteries, veins and capillaries) that send blood through the body

C **CALCIUM CHANNEL BLOCKER** – a drug that lowers blood pressure by preventing calcium from going into the cells of the heart and vessel walls

CARDIOMYOPATHY – a disease of the heart muscle that causes it to weaken and lose its full pumping force

CARDIOMYOPLASTY – surgery for heart failure that takes muscles from the abdomen or back and wraps them around the heart to increase the heart's pumping action

CHOLESTEROL – a soft, waxy substance made in the liver and sent to many parts of the body; it also comes from foods like eggs, dairy, and meats; too much cholesterol is not good for your body

CHOLESTEROL (HDL) – the cholesterol in high-density lipoproteins; often called the "good" cholesterol because it may protect against heart disease; an HDL of 60 mg/dL or above is best

CHOLESTEROL (LDL) – the cholesterol in low-density lipoproteins; often called the "bad" cholesterol because it can slowly build up in the arteries that go to the heart and brain; an LDL of less than 100 mg/dL is best

CONGENITAL HEART DISEASE – any heart condition that you are born with

CONGESTIVE HEART FAILURE (CHF) – the heart cannot pump blood efficiently through the blood vessels that may lead to a build up of fluids in the body

CORONARY ARTERY BYPASS – surgery in which an artery from another part of your body is used to go around a diseased or blocked artery in your heart so blood flow to the heart is restored

CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE – a build up of fatty tissue that narrows the arteries and reduces blood flow to the heart; the lack of oxygen to the heart may lead to a heart attack

D **DIASTOLIC BLOOD PRESSURE** – the pressure of blood against the artery walls when the heart is at rest; this is the bottom or second number in reading blood pressure; a blood pressure below 120/80 is normal

DIGOXIN (or digitalis) – a drug used to treat congestive heart failure or atrial fibrillation; it makes the heart muscle pump stronger, slows the rate of the heartbeat and helps remove extra fluid from body tissues

DYSPNEA – hard to breathe; shortness of breath

DYSRHYTHMIA – heartbeat that is not normal

E **ECHOCARDIOGRAPHY** – a way to take pictures of the heart using sound waves to diagnose heart problems

EDEMA – swelling of tissue or organs due to too much fluid

EJECTION FRACTION – the amount of blood pumped out of the heart with each heartbeat; it tells how well the heart is pumping

ELECTROCARDIOGRAM (EKG OR ECG) – a test that records the electric activity in your heart to see if anything is not normal

ENDOCARDITIS – a swelling inside the heart often due to a bacterial infection

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

H HEART ATTACK – (sometimes called a coronary) damage to the heart when blood flow stops

HEART DISEASE – used to describe a heart disorder, including high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, and clogged arteries

HYPERTENSION – high blood pressure that can lead to heart disease, stroke, or kidney disease

HYPOTENSION – low blood pressure

I INVASIVE – a medical procedure that involves entry into the body via a needle, tube, or hand

ISCHEMIC – decrease in oxygen and blood to part of the body due to partial or total blockage of an artery

L LEFT-VENTRICULAR HEART FAILURE (LVF) – results from damage to the chambers on the left side of the heart

LIPOPROTEIN – a molecule that is a combination of lipid (fat) and protein; lipoproteins are the form in which lipids travel through the blood

M MUGA (MULTIPLE GATED ACQUISITION) SCAN – a test to assess heart function in which a radioactive substance is put into the blood; a camera measures the size and shape of the ventricles as well as blood flow

MYOCARDIAL INFARCTION – a heart attack

MYOCARDITIS – swelling of the myocardium (heart wall made up of muscle)

P PULMONARY EDEMA – fluid build up in the lungs, often due to heart failure

R RIGHT-VENTRICULAR HEART FAILURE (RVF) – results from damage to the chambers on the right side of the heart

S STRESS TEST – an exercise or treadmill test that shows how well the heart works because it needs more oxygen when heart rate and blood pressure are up; EKG readings show where the heart is not normal

SYSTOLIC BLOOD PRESSURE – pressure of blood against artery walls when the heart contracts; this is the top or first number in reading blood pressure; a blood pressure below 120/80 is normal

V VASOCONSTRICTOR – a substance used to narrow the blood vessel to raise blood pressure

VASODILATION – a blood vessel is made wider to increase blood flow and lower blood pressure

VEIN – a blood vessel that carries blood from the various parts of the body back to the heart

VENTRICLE – one of the two (right and left) lower chambers of the heart; the right ventricle pumps blood to the lungs, and the left ventricle sends blood with oxygen to the rest of the body

Diagnosing Heart Disease Websites

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

American Heart Association

www.heart.org/HEARTORG/

Website features: heart attack warning signs, latest news, disease statistics, nutrition tips, medical encyclopedia, Spanish language information, and links to additional resources.

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

www.nhlbi.nih.gov/index.htm

Website features: diseases and conditions index, clinical trials information, health assessment tools, healthy recipes, and educational tutorials.

National Women's Health Information Center

www.4women.gov/faq/heart-disease.cfm

Website features: frequently asked questions and answers for women about heart disease.

NOAH: New York Online Access to Health

www.noah-health.org/en/blood/disease/

Website features: definitions, care and treatment, causes and risk factors, warning signs, diagnostic test information, and descriptions about surgical procedures.

MEDLINEplus from the National Library of Medicine

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

Website features: latest news, overviews, diagnosis/symptoms, treatment, prevention, alternative therapy, clinical trials, research, genetics, and glossaries.

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 www.caphis.mlanet.org/consumer/.

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