

Medspeak In Plain Language

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Many Americans have questions about **diabetes**. You may be one of them! You may read newspapers or magazines. You may listen to radio or watch TV. You may even 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 diabetes-related “medspeak” terms. We wrote this to make it easier to understand what a doctor or nurse tells you about diabetes. 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
www.mlanet.org

 **MAHSLIN**
Prepared in cooperation with the
Massachusetts Health Sciences Library Network (MAHSLIN)
Working Group for Health Literacy

Deciphering Diabetes Medspeak

A **A1C** – This test is often given to someone who has just found out they have diabetes. It shows the average amount of glucose in the blood over the last several months.

ADULT-ONSET DIABETES – an older term for Type 2 Diabetes

ADVANCED GLYCOSYLATION END PRODUCTS – The body makes these when glucose mixes with protein. They can harm blood vessels.

ALPHA CELL – a cell in the pancreas. It makes glucagon.

ALPHA-GLUCOSIDASE INHIBITORS – drugs that help lower blood glucose in the body. They stop the breakdown of starches and some sugars. They should be taken with the first bite of a meal.

AMYLIN – a hormone made in the pancreas. It controls how glucose flows into the blood. It slows down how fast your stomach empties after a meal.

B **BETA CELL** – a cell in the pancreas. It makes insulin.

BIGUANIDES – drugs that lower the amount of glucose made by your liver. This drug helps to keep your blood sugar low.

BLOOD GLUCOSE – Your body changes your food into this type of sugar. It is your body's main source of energy.

BLOOD GLUCOSE MONITORING – The regular way to check the amount of glucose in your blood. You use a test strip.

BOLUS – an extra dose of medicine given by a shot or an insulin pump. It controls a rise in blood sugar level.

BRITTLE DIABETES – when blood sugar levels go from low to high without a known cause. These changes are hard to control.

C **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.

C-PEPTIDE TEST – a test showing how much insulin the body is making

CREATININE – a waste product from protein in the diet and from the muscles of the body. Our kidneys remove creatinine from the body. Too much creatinine in the blood means that the kidneys are not working normally.

D **DAWN PHENOMENON** – a common rise in blood glucose early in the morning in a diabetic person

DEXTROSE – another word for glucose or simple sugar in the blood

DIALYSIS – an artificial way to clean the blood when the kidneys no longer can do it. A special machine does this.

DIABETES – common name for diabetes mellitus. Diabetes happens when the body is not able to change glucose to energy. This happens when the body does not make enough insulin or use it. (See also Type 1 Diabetes, Type 2 Diabetes)

D-PHENYLALANINE DERIVATIVES (Nateglinide) – drugs that lower blood glucose. They help the pancreas make more insulin right after you eat.

E **EUGLYCEMIA** – a normal amount of glucose in your blood

F **FASTING GLUCOSE TEST** – a blood test used to see if you have diabetes. Fasting means not eating or drinking for 8-12 hours before the test. The doctor will talk to you about the results of your test.

G GLOMERULAR FILTRATION RATE – The kidney is part of the body that gets rid of waste. This rate shows how well the kidney is working.

GLUCAGON – Cells in the pancreas make glucagon. Glucagon sends sugar into the blood. A glucagon test can tell if a person has early diabetes.

GLUCOSE – Your body needs energy to do things. A main source of energy is a type of sugar called glucose. We get glucose from what we eat and drink.

GLYCEMIC INDEX – measures how a food raises blood sugar levels over a period of two hours. High glycemic foods raise blood sugar levels faster.

H HORMONE – This is a chemical in your bloodstream. Some help your body get energy from the food you eat.

HUMAN LEUKOCYTE ANTIGENS (HLA) – genes that help your immune system find germs in your body. HLA tests can show a higher risk of Type 1 Diabetes.

HYPERGLYCEMIA – when your blood sugar is too high. This might be because of too much food or too little insulin. You may feel thirsty and urinate a lot. You might have blurred vision or feel tired. Very high blood sugar can cause a coma.

HYPERLIPIDEMIA – high amounts of fat and cholesterol in your blood. It can cause heart disease.

HYPEROSMOLAR HYPERGLYCEMIC NONKETONIC SYNDROME (HHNS) – a serious problem that occurs when your blood sugar level is very high. No ketones are in the blood or urine. This can cause death if not treated.

HYPOGLYCEMIA – when your blood sugar is too low. You may feel shaky, dizzy, confused or weak.

I INSULIN – a hormone that lets your body use sugar properly. It is made in the pancreas gland.

INSULIN RESISTANCE – when your body cannot use insulin to turn glucose into energy. If too much glucose builds up in your blood, you can get sick. You would be insulin resistant.

J JUVENILE DIABETES – an older term for Type 1 Diabetes

K KETONE – a chemical that's made when the body burns fat for energy. This can happen when there is not enough insulin to help your body use glucose for energy.

KETOSIS – when the body cannot use glucose it changes stored fats into energy. The signs of ketosis are nausea, vomiting and stomach pain.

KIDNEYS – a two-part organ in the lower back. Kidneys filter waste and extra fluid from the blood. This fluid passes out of the body as urine.

L LIVER – This is the largest organ in the body. It changes food into energy. It also removes alcohol and poisons from the blood. It makes bile. Bile helps digest the food you eat.

M MEGLITINIDES – drugs that help the body make insulin. They are taken before each meal.

MIXED DOSE – a mix of two types of insulin in one shot. One acts quickly. The other is for longer insulin control.

S SELF-MANAGEMENT – a person's plan for keeping diabetes under control. The plan will list your foods and exercise. It says when to check your blood glucose levels. It helps you know when to take your medicines.

SULFONYLUREAS – drugs that help the pancreas release more insulin. These medicines are usually taken before a meal, once or twice a day.

T THIAZOLIDINEDIONES – drugs that help insulin work better in your body. These medicines are taken once or twice a day with food. Your doctor will order tests to check your liver when you take these drugs.

TRIGLYCERIDE – another word for fat

TYPE 1 DIABETES – Your body does not make insulin with this type of diabetes. Children and young adults most often have this type.

TYPE 2 DIABETES – Your body does not make enough insulin or does not use the insulin properly with this type of diabetes. Adults most often have this type.

U URINE ALBUMIN TEST – a test to measure how much protein is in your urine. A high amount could mean you have kidney disease.

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 per os, 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

Diagnosing Diabetes Web sites

The Medical Library Association (MLA) finds the following Web sites particularly useful for understanding stroke disease. For a current list, visit <http://www.mlanet.org>.

The American Diabetes Association

<http://www.diabetes.org>

Web site features: news section, overview of the disease, risk test, statistics, nutrition and healthy recipes section.

National Diabetes Education Program (National Institute of Health and Centers for Disease Control)

<http://ndep.nih.gov/>

Web site features: information for minorities, Spanish language and Asian-American information, tips on how to prevent and control diabetes, children and adolescent resources.

National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Disease, National Institute of Health)

<http://www.diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/>

Web site features: treatment options, complications and prevention, statistics, clinical trials, Spanish language information and links to additional resources.

Joslin Diabetes Center (Harvard Medical School)

<http://www.joslin.org/>

Web site features: news section, discussion boards, library of terms, online classes, Spanish and Asian-American sections.

Children With Diabetes

<http://www.childrenwithdiabetes.com>

Web site features: news section, library of terms, childrens' section, parents' section and "ask the experts" section.

MEDLINEplus® from the National Library of Medicine

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/>

Web site features: health topics, drug information, medical encyclopedia, library of terms, general health news and directories for locating doctors and hospitals.

The Consumer and Patient Health Information Section (CAPHIS) of MLA evaluates Web sites 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 <http://caphis.mlanet.org/consumer/index.html>



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