

A Little Bit of Latin and Greek

International Skin Beauty Academy · 2026

Background | FYI Only

Modern Western medicine traces its roots to the 5th century BCE, when the Greek physician Hippocrates first attributed illness to physical causes. Hippocrates and one of his successors, Galen, produced medical writings in Greek.

From the beginning of the Christian era to the early 19th century, Latin was the language of the Roman Empire and served as the universal language for scholarly communication. It was maintained as an international medium because it was more widely known. It later died out as a spoken language, yet remained in use for scientific and technical purposes.

The language of medicine consists largely of Latin terms, many of which contain stems derived or adapted from Greek. Today, Latin remains the official language of anatomic terminology. Many terms in physiology, pathology, and pharmacology are Latin or Latinized Greek.

Certain grammatical patterns and rules characteristic of the classical languages have been adopted into medical English. The manner in which English speakers pronounce medical terms borrowed from classical Greek or Latin is neither fully standardized nor internally consistent.

You Know Them All (or Almost All)

Common concepts appear in both Greek and Latin — and you encounter them every day.

CONCEPT	GREEK	LATIN
Tongue	gloss- (glossary)	lingv- (linguistics)
Mouth	stomat- (stomatology)	or- (orator)
Two (2)	du- (duet)	bi- (bilingual, biceps)
Three (3)	tri- (trifacial)	tri- (triceps)
Four (4)	tetra- (tetris)	quadri- (quadriceps)
Eight (8)	octo- (octopus)	octo- (octomom)
Cold	cryo- (cryotherapy)	frigidi- (refrigerator)
Equal	iso- (isometric)	equi- (equivalent)
Alike	homo- (homosexual)	simili- (similarity)
Square	quadrati- (quadrate)	rectanguli- (rectangle)
Long	macro- (macrobiotics)	longi- (longevity)

It Is Easy as... One, Two, Three!

The systematic approach to word building is based on: **prefix — word root — suffix**.

A) Word Root

Most medical terms have a **word root** on which other parts are attached — the **base** of the word. The word root usually describes one of four categories:

Body Part

arteri-, gastr-, thorac-, pulmon-

Color

albin-, cyan-, erythr-, leuk-

Substance

oxy-, glyc-, hydr-, myc-, seb-, electro-

Action

phag-, palp-

Medical roots generally go together by language: Greek roots go with Greek prefixes and suffixes, and Latin roots go with Latin prefixes and suffixes.

B) Prefixes

Prefixes cannot be used alone in English — they always appear at the **beginning** of a word. Not all medical words have prefixes.

A prefix modifies the word root by adding information about the:

- **location of an organ** (upper-, in-, extra-, intra-)
- **number of parts** (multi-, bi-)
- **condition** (dys-, ab-)
- **time** (pre-, post-)
- **frequency** (bi-, tri-)

C) Suffixes

The **suffix** is the **ending** of the word and adds meaning such as:

- **condition or state** (-algia, -itis, -oma, -is)
- **disease process or action** (-crine, -genic, -gnosis, -graph, -poiesis)
- **procedure** (-suction, -scopy, -pexy, -therapy)
- **instrument** (-scope)
- **study or specialization** (-ology)

Combining It All

What can we combine? Everything!

Root + Suffix → gastr/ + itis = **gastritis**

Prefix + Root + Suffix → endo/ + fascili/ + itis = **endofasciliitis**

The combining vowel "**o**" or "**i**" is sometimes inserted between roots:

hemat/o/logy = **hematology**

gastr/o/enter/itis = **gastroenteritis**

electr/o/cardi/o/gram = **electrocardiogram**

Pronunciation Rules

Many medical terms retain their classical spelling but are pronounced in syllables as if English. One letter can change the entire meaning — for example, **ileum** (small intestine) vs. **ilium** (hip bone) — but honest mistakes are not fatal.

RULE	EXAMPLE WORD	HOW TO SAY IT
Final -e is silent	→ <i>hydrocele</i>	HY-dro-seel
-ie- is a diphthong (like brief)	→ <i>caries</i>	KAIR-ee-eez
Initial x- sounds like z	→ <i>xylophone</i>	ZY-lo-fohn
-ch- sounds like k	→ <i>chronic</i>	KRON-ik
-ph- sounds like f	→ <i>philosophy</i>	fil-OS-oh-fee
-c- sounds like k	→ <i>calculus</i>	KAL-kyoo-lus
-c- sounds like s	→ <i>acinus</i>	AS-in-us
-c+e or c+i sounds like sh (ocean)	→ <i>facial</i>	FAY-shul
-cc- sounds like ks	→ <i>coccygeus</i>	kok-SIJ-ee-us
-g- sounds like in go	→ <i>gumma</i>	GUM-ah
-g- sounds like j	→ <i>agenesis</i>	ay-JEN-eh-sis
-p- is silent at start of word	→ <i>pneumonia</i>	noo-MOH-nee-ah
-cn-, -ct-, -gn-: first consonant silent	→ <i>cnidocyst</i>	NY-doh-sist

When in doubt about the meaning or spelling of a word – look it up in a medical dictionary.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations save time but can cause errors — always spell out the full term when there is any doubt, and never create your own abbreviations.

ABBR.	FULL TERM
VITAL SIGNS & ASSESSMENT	
BP	Blood Pressure
HR	Heart Rate
RR	Respiratory Rate
T°	Temperature
O₂ sat	Oxygen Saturation
Hx	History
Dx	Diagnosis
Sx	Symptoms / Signs
Rx	Prescription / Treatment
CC	Chief Complaint
CLINICAL & EMERGENCY	
STAT	Immediately (Statim)
NPO	Nothing by Mouth (Nil Per Os)
DNR	Do Not Resuscitate
CPR	Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation
SOB	Shortness of Breath
CVA	Cerebrovascular Accident (Stroke)
MI	Myocardial Infarction
HTN	Hypertension
DM	Diabetes Mellitus
UTI	Urinary Tract Infection
COPD	Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease
ROUTES OF ADMINISTRATION	
PO	By Mouth (Per Os)
IV	Intravenous
IM	Intramuscular
SQ / SC	Subcutaneous
PRN	As Needed (Pro Re Nata)

ABBR.	FULL TERM
DOSING FREQUENCY	
QD	Every Day (Quaque Die)
BID	Twice Daily (Bis In Die)
TID	Three Times Daily (Ter In Die)
QID	Four Times Daily (Quater In Die)
DIAGNOSTICS & LAB	
ECG / EKG	Electrocardiogram
CBC	Complete Blood Count
BMP	Basic Metabolic Panel
WBC	White Blood Cell Count
RBC	Red Blood Cell Count
AP	Anteroposterior
CV	Cardiovascular
GI	Gastrointestinal
GU	Genitourinary
MS	Musculoskeletal
UGI	Upper Gastrointestinal

Other Grammar Rules, Plurals, and Spelling

Just listen to your intuition. You'll be fine!

P.S.: Didn't I tell you it was easy? That's because you are intelligent and capable!

With love, Dr. Doran