

Medical English Vocabulary

Here is some essential vocabulary for nurses and medical professionals working in an English-speaking context. Each word is shown with its part of speech and meaning, while an example sentence shows the word in context.

word <i>part of speech</i>	meaning	example sentence
abnormal <i>adj</i>	not normal for the human body	This amount of weight loss is abnormal for women your age.
ache <i>noun/verb</i>	pain that won't go away	I can't sleep because my knees ache in the night.
acute <i>adj</i>	quick to become severe/bad	We knew the baby was coming right away because the woman's labour pains were acute .
allergy <i>noun</i> allergic <i>adj</i>	a body's abnormal reaction to certain foods or environmental substances (e.g. causes a rash)	Your son is extremely allergic to peanuts.

ambulance <i>noun</i>	emergency vehicle that rushes people to a hospital	We called the ambulance when Josh stopped breathing.
amnesia <i>noun</i>	a condition that causes people to lose their memory	I can't remember the accident because I had amnesia .
amputation <i>noun</i> amputate <i>verb</i>	permanent removal of a limb	We had to amputate his leg because the infection spread so quickly.
anaemia <i>noun</i> anaemic <i>adj</i>	occurs when the body doesn't have enough red blood cells	I have low energy because I am anaemic .
antibiotics <i>noun</i>	medication that kills bacteria and cures infections	My throat infection went away after I started the antibiotics .
anti-depressant <i>noun</i>	medication that helps relieve anxiety and sadness	The anti-depressants helped me get on with life after Lucy died.
appointment <i>noun</i>	a scheduled meeting with a medical professional	I've made you an appointment with a specialist in three week's time.

arthritis <i>noun</i>	a disease that causes the joints to become swollen and crippled	My grandmother can't knit anymore because the arthritis in her hands is so bad.
asthma (attack) <i>noun</i>	a condition that causes a blockage of the airway and makes it difficult for a person to breathe	I carry an inhaler when I run because I have asthma .
bacteria <i>noun</i>	a disease-causing organism	To prevent the spread of bacteria it is important that nurses wash their hands often.
bedsore <i>noun</i>	wounds that develop on a patient's body from lying in one place for too long	If you don't get up and take a walk, you will develop painful bedsores .
benign <i>adj</i>	not harmful (not cancerous)	We're hoping that the tests will show that the lump in your breast is benign .
biopsy <i>noun</i>	removal of human tissue in order to conduct certain medical tests	The biopsy ruled out a number of illnesses.

blood count <i>noun</i>	the amount of red and white blood cells a person has	You will be happy to know that your blood count is almost back to normal.
blood donor <i>noun</i>	a person who gives blood to a blood bank or other person	Blood donors have to answer questions about their medical history.
blood pressure <i>noun</i>	the rate at which blood flows through the body (high/low)	High blood pressure puts you at risk of having a heart attack.
brace <i>noun</i>	a device that holds injured body parts in place	You will probably always have to wear a brace on your ankle when you jog.
breech <i>adj</i>	position of an unborn baby in which the feet are down and the head is up	We thought it was going to be a breech birth, but the baby turned himself around.
broken <i>adj</i>	a bone that is divided in two or more pieces as a result of an injury	We thought it was just a sprain, but it turned out his leg was broken .

bruise <i>noun</i> bruised <i>adj</i>	injured body tissue that is visible underneath the skin	The woman was badly bruised when she came into the emergency room.
Caesarean section, C-section <i>noun</i>	procedure that involves removing a baby from its mother through an incision in the woman's lower abdomen	The baby was so large that we had to perform a Caesarean section .
cancer <i>noun</i>	disease caused by the uncontrollable growth of cells	There are many different options when it comes to treating cancer .
cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) <i>noun</i>	restoring a person's breath and circulation	You saved your brother's life by performing CPR .
cast <i>noun</i>	a hard bandage that is wrapped around a broken bone to keep it in place	My leg was in a cast for graduation.
chapel, chapeline <i>noun</i>	a place where loved ones can go to pray for a patient's recovery; a priest who visits	If you want a place to pray, the chapel is on the third floor.

	patients in the hospital	
chemotherapy <i>noun</i>	type of treatment used on cancer patients	My mother has already had three rounds of chemotherapy .
chickenpox <i>noun</i>	a virus commonly contracted by children, characterized by itchy spots all over the body	It is best to get chickenpox as a child so that you don't get it worse as an adult.
coroner <i>noun</i>	a person who determines the cause of death after a person dies	We only call the coroner if we think a death is suspicious.
critical condition <i>noun</i>	requiring immediate and constant medical attention	You can't see her right now; she's in critical condition .
crutches <i>noun</i>	objects that people with injured legs or feet use to help them walk	I'd rather hop on one foot than use crutches .

cyst <i>noun</i>	a sac in the body-tissue filled with fluid (sometimes diseased)	We're going to remove the cysts just to be on the safe side.
deaf <i>adj</i>	unable to hear	The accident left the patient both deaf and blind.
deficiency <i>noun</i>	a lack of something necessary for one's health	The tests show that you have an iron deficiency .
dehydrated <i>adj</i>	in need of water	It is easy for the elderly to become dehydrated in this heat.
dementia <i>noun</i>	loss of mental capacity	It is hard to watch a loved one suffering with dementia .
diabetes <i>noun</i>	type of disease typically involving insulin deficiency	People with diabetes have to constantly check their blood sugar levels.
diagnosis <i>noun</i>	medical explanation of an illness or condition	The doctor would prefer to share the diagnosis with the patient himself.

discomfort <i>noun</i>	experiencing pain	This pain medication should relieve some of your discomfort .
disease <i>noun</i>	a medical disorder that is harmful to a person's health	I understand that this disease runs in your family.
dislocated <i>adj</i>	when a bone is temporarily separated from its joint	You will have to wear a sling because of your dislocated shoulder.
emergency <i>noun</i>	a medical problem that needs immediate attention	It is important that children know which number to dial in case of an emergency .
ER (emergency room) <i>noun</i>	the hospital room used for treating patients with immediate and life-threatening injuries	The child was rushed into the ER after he had a severe allergic reaction to a bee sting.
external <i>adj</i>	on the outside	This cream is for external use only. Do not get it near your ears, eyes, or mouth.

false negative <i>noun</i> <i>adj</i>	a test that incorrectly comes back negative	We had two false negative pregnancy tests, so we didn't know we were having a baby.
family history <i>noun</i>	medical background of a person's family members	The doctor was concerned about my family history of skin cancer.
fatal <i>adj</i>	causing death	The doctor made a fatal error when he wrote the wrong prescription.
fever <i>noun</i> feverish <i>adj</i>	higher than normal body temperature	He is very feverish , and his temperature is near danger point.
flu (influenza) <i>noun</i>	many types of respiratory or intestinal infections passed on through a virus	People who have the flu should not visit hospital patients.
fracture <i>noun</i> fractured <i>adj</i>	broken or cracked bone	Your wrist is fractured and needs a cast.
germ <i>noun</i>	a micro-organism, especially one that causes disease	Flowers are not allowed in the ward to avoid the risk of germs being brought in.

genetic <i>adj</i>	a medical condition or physical feature that is passed on in the family	The disease is part genetic and part environmental.
growth <i>noun</i>	a ball of tissue that grows bigger than normal, either on or under the skin	That growth on your shoulder is starting to worry me.
heart attack <i>noun</i>	instance in which blood stops pumping through the heart	People who smoke are at greater risk of having a heart attack .
HIV <i>noun</i>	the virus that infects the human T-cells and leads to AIDS	HIV can be passed down from the mother to her fetus.
hives <i>noun</i>	bumps that appear on the surface of the skin during an allergic reaction	I broke out in hives after I ate that potato casserole.
illness <i>noun</i> ill <i>adj</i>	general term for any condition that makes a person feel sick for a certain period of time	Her illness went away when she started eating better.

immune system <i>noun</i>	the parts of the body that fight diseases, infections, and viruses	You can't have visitors because your immune system is low.
immunization <i>noun</i> immunize <i>verb</i>	an injection that protects against a specific disease	Babies are immunized three times in their first year.
incision <i>noun</i>	cut in the body made during surgery	I had to have stitches to close the incision .
inconclusive <i>adj</i>	unclear	We have to do more x-rays because the first ones were inconclusive .
infant <i>noun</i>	young baby	The nurse will demonstrate how to bathe an infant .
infection <i>noun</i> infected <i>adj</i>	diseased area of the body (viral or bacterial)	The wound should be covered when you swim to prevent it from becoming infected .
inflamed <i>adj</i>	appearance (red and swollen) of an injured body part	My right ankle was so inflamed it was twice the size of my left one.

injury <i>noun</i>	damage to the body	Her injuries were minor; just a few cuts and bruises.
intensive care unit (ICU) <i>noun</i>	section of the hospital where patients get constant attention and doctors rely on specialized equipment	She will remain in the ICU until she can breathe on her own.
internal <i>adj</i>	under the skin, inside the organs	The doctors will be monitoring her for any internal bleeding.
itchy <i>adj</i>	feeling discomfort on the skin's surface	If you are allergic to this medication your skin will get red and itchy .
IV <i>noun</i>	a tube that pumps liquids and medication into a patient's body	The toddler was so dehydrated that the doctor decided to get him on an IV .

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lab results <i>noun</i>	tests that come back from a laboratory and	The lab results have come in and you are free to go home.
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	help doctors make a diagnosis	
lab (laboratory) <i>noun</i>	place where samples of blood/urine etc. are taken for testing	I'll take these samples down to the lab on my way out.
life support <i>noun</i>	a machine that keeps patients alive by helping them breathe	The woman has severe brain damage and is currently on life support .
life-threatening <i>adj</i>	when injuries and conditions are extremely serious	The victim was shot in two places but the bullet wounds are not life-threatening .
light-headed <i>adj</i>	feeling of dizziness and being off-balance, caused by lack of oxygen in the brain	If you are feeling light-headed again, lie down and call me.
malignant <i>adj</i>	expected to grow and get much worse (especially related to cancerous cells)	I'm afraid at least one of the tumours is malignant .
medical school (med. school) <i>noun</i>	place where someone trains to be a doctor	After eight years of medical school I can finally practice medicine.

newborn <i>noun</i>	an infant that is less than three months old	You have to support her neck because she is still a newborn .
numb <i>adj</i>	no feeling in a certain body part	The needle will make your lower body feel numb .
OR (operating room) <i>noun</i>	the place where major surgeries and operations take place	You must wear a face mask and gloves while you are in the OR .
operation <i>noun</i> operate on <i>verb</i>	a medical procedure that involves going inside a person's body in an attempt to fix a problem	The operation lasted seven hours, but it was successful.
pain <i>noun</i>	strong discomfort in certain areas of the body	We gave your husband some medicine to relieve some of the pain .
pain killer, pain reliever <i>noun</i>	type of medicine that takes away some or all of the discomfort of an illness or injury	You can take two pain killers every four hours.
paralyzed <i>adj</i>	unable to move certain areas of the body	We thought her legs were paralyzed for life, but she is learning how to walk.

patient <i>noun</i>	a person staying in a hospital or medical facility	The patients in Room 4 are not getting along.
pharmacist <i>noun</i>	a person who fills a doctor's prescription and gives people advice about medication	Ask the pharmacist if there is a generic brand of this medication.
pharmacy, drugstore <i>noun</i>	a place where people go to buy medication and other medical supplies	You should be able to buy a bandage at the pharmacy .
physician <i>noun</i>	doctor	Ask your family physician to refer you to a specialist.
poison <i>noun</i> poisonous <i>adj</i>	a substance that is very dangerous if it enters the human body	The child was bitten by a poisonous snake.
prenatal <i>adj</i>	of the time period leading up to giving birth	The woman was well prepared for labour because she took the prenatal classes.
prescription <i>noun</i> prescribe <i>verb</i>	the correct amount and type of medication needed to cure an	You will need to visit your doctor to get another prescription .

	illness or relieve symptoms	
privacy <i>noun</i> private <i>adj</i>	being alone; personal (e.g. test results)	You will have to pay for a private hospital room if you don't want a room-mate.
radiation <i>noun</i>	high energy X-rays that destroy cancer cells	If the radiation doesn't kill all of the abnormal cells, the cancer will come back.
residency resident <i>noun</i>	part of a doctor's training that takes place in the hospital; a student working under a doctor	John is a resident under Dr Brown.
routine check-up <i>noun</i>	a doctor's appointment to check a person's general health	I'd like to see you a year from now for a routine check-up .
scrubs <i>noun</i>	plain uniform (usually green, white, or blue) worn by medical professionals	I have some extra scrubs in my locker.
scrub up <i>verb</i>	carefully wash hands before and after seeing a patient	I have to scrub up and get ready for surgery.

second opinion <i>noun</i>	input from a second doctor about an illness or symptom	I went to another doctor to get a second opinion about these headaches.
seizure <i>noun</i>	sudden violent movements or unconsciousness caused by electrical signal malfunction in the brain	People who suffer from epilepsy are prone to seizures .
shock <i>noun</i>	body not getting enough blood flow	The woman was in shock after being pulled from the river.
side effects <i>noun</i>	other symptoms that might occur as a result of a certain medication or procedure	One of the side effects of antidepressants is a loss of appetite.
sore <i>adj</i>	painful	I have a sore throat and a runny nose.
spasm <i>noun</i>	the uncontrollable tightening of a muscle	Ever since I injured my leg I've been having muscle spasms in my upper thigh.

specialist <i>noun</i>	a doctor that is an expert in a certain kind of medicine	My family doctor is sending me to a specialist .
sprain <i>noun/verb</i>	an injury (less serious than a break) to a joint (ankle, wrist, knee etc)	I sprained my knee playing soccer.
stable condition <i>noun</i>	a patient is stable if their medical condition is no longer changing rapidly	You can see your husband now; he is in a stable condition .
sting <i>noun/verb</i>	sharp, temporary pain	It may sting when I insert the needle.
stress <i>noun</i> stressed <i>adj</i>	worry that causes muscles to tighten and blood pressure to rise	You need to take some time off work and relieve some of your stress .
swelling <i>noun</i> swollen <i>adj</i>	ligaments (parts that hold the joints together) growing bigger and rounder after an injury to a joint	I knew my ankle was sprained because it was so swollen .
symptoms <i>noun</i>	pain or physical changes that occur	You have all of the symptoms of a diabetic.

	because of an illness or disease	
temperature <i>noun</i>	amount of heat measured in a body; higher than normal temperature	We brought Jesse to emergency because he was running a (high) temperature .
tender <i>adj</i>	painful when touched or used	The incision was tender after the surgery.
test results <i>noun</i>	medical information that helps doctors understand a patient's condition or body	The test results came back negative. You aren't pregnant.
therapy <i>noun</i>	treatment aimed at improving a person's mental or physical condition	I was able to go back to work a few weeks after starting the therapy .
transplant <i>noun</i>	moving of an organ from one human to another	The heart transplant saved your life.
ultrasound <i>noun</i>	a test that examines the body's internal organs and processes using sound waves (often	The ultrasound shows that we are expecting a baby boy.

	used during pregnancies)	
umbilical cord <i>noun</i>	the lifeline from the mother to the fetus (when cut at birth this forms the belly button)	I had an emergency C-section because the umbilical cord was wrapped around the baby's neck.
unconscious <i>adj</i>	alive, but appearing to be asleep and unaware of the surroundings	I hit my head on the steering wheel and was still unconscious when the ambulance arrived.
urine sample <i>noun</i>	a small amount of the body's liquid waste that is tested for different medical reasons	The urine sample tells us how much alcohol is in your blood.
vein <i>noun</i>	the thin tubes that transport blood around the body and back to the heart	I'm just looking for the best vein in which to insert the needle.
virus <i>noun</i>	a dangerous organism that causes the spread of minor and major diseases	The virus is contractable through the exchange of bodily fluids.

visiting hours <i>noun</i>	time of day when friends and family are allowed to visit patients in hospital	I'm afraid you'll have to come back during visiting hours .
vomit <i>noun/verb</i>	discharge of a person stomach contents through the mouth	The pregnant woman can't stop vomiting .
ward <i>noun</i>	a section of a hospital or health facility where patients stay	I should warn you that we're entering the mental health ward .
wheelchair <i>noun</i>	a chair on wheels used for transporting patients from place to place	If you get in the wheelchair I'll take you down to see the garden.
wound <i>noun</i> wounded <i>adj</i>	injury to body ("flesh wound" means not deep)	The wounded soldiers are being airlifted to the hospital.
x-ray <i>noun/verb</i>	a photograph of a person's bones and organs	The technician took x-rays of my shoulder to make sure it wasn't broken.