

Guide to Understanding Medical Terminology

Understanding medical terminology is as difficult as understanding Greek for many people. This comparison is quite valid because many of the basic medical terms stem from the Greek or Latin language. Added to these basic terms are one or more letters before the word (prefixes) or after the word (suffixes) which either alter or enhance the meaning. The following pages are organized into sections of suffixes, prefixes and then stem or root words. Lengthy medical terms can often be understood by breaking them down into their roots and affixes, as is shown in the article. This will help your reading understanding of the words, but proper pronunciation can come only through conversational use. The majority of these terms can be found in a standard dictionary, which will provide the syllabic breakdowns, inflections, and pronunciations when needed.

The following is from the Northwestern University Prosthetic-Orthotic Center's instructional material prepared by Mr. Charles Fryer for prosthetists, orthotists, and rehabilitation personnel. The compilation is based on the premise that the technical vocabulary of the prosthetist-orthotist deals most frequently with the neuromusculoskeletal and articular systems of the human body.

Michael Quigley, C.P.O.

PREFIXES

PREFIXES: One or more letters or syllables combined at the beginning of a word to further explain or add to meaning. An example of a true prefix is "INTER." As the forepart of a word it expresses the meaning "between." INTERNational means "BETWEEN" nations. The prefix "INTRA" means "WITHIN." Consequently, the word INTRAMuscular means "WITHIN" a muscle.