

Common Medical Abbreviations, Acronyms, and Terms

Mometrix TEST PREPARATION

A

Term	Meaning
@	At
A/G	Albumin/globulin ratio
AA	Of each, equal parts
AAL	Anterior axillary line
Abd.	Abdomen
ABG	Arterial blood gas
ABR	Absolute bed rest
AC	Before eating
ACE	Angiotensin converting enzyme
ACL	Anterior cruciate ligament
ACLS	Advanced cardiac life support
ACTH	Adrenocorticotrophic hormone
AD	Admitting diagnosis
ADL	Activities of daily living
Adm.	Admission
Ad. Spec.	Admission urine specimen
A. Fib.	Atrial fibrillation
AGA	Appropriate for gestational age
AI	Aortic insufficiency
AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
AKA	Above-knee amputation

Term	Meaning
ALD	Alcoholic liver disease
ALL	Acute lymphocytic leukemia
ALP	Alkaline phosphatase
ALT	Alanine transaminase
	Alanine aminotransferase
AM	Morning
Amb.	Ambulation, walking, ambulatory
Amt.	Amount
AP	Appendectomy
Approx.	Approximately
APR	Abdominoperineal resection
ARF	Acute renal failure
ASA	Acute surgical abdomen
ASF	Anterior decompression spinal fusion
ATN	Acute tubular necrosis
AU	Both ears
AV	Atrioventricular



Be specific with amputations! In documentation, always include the side as well. Leaving off "left" or "right" can lead to serious miscommunication.

- **R AKA** = amputation above right knee
- **L AKA** = amputation above left knee

-B-

Term	Meaning
B/K	Below knee
B&B	Bowel and bladder training
BAT	Brain attack team
BG	Blood glucose
BID	Twice a day
BIH	Bilateral inguinal hernia
BJA	Below-knee amputation

Term	Meaning
BM	Bowel movement or breast milk
BP	Blood pressure
BR	Bed rest
BRP	Bathroom privileges
BSC	Bedside commode
BX	Biopsy

-C-

Term	Meaning
°C	Degree(s) Celsius (or centigrade)
C/O	Complaint of
c	With
CA	Calcium, cancer, carcinoma
CAA	Crystalline amino acids
CABG	Coronary artery bypass graft
CAD	Coronary artery disease
CAPD	Continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis
CAT	Computerized axial tomography
CBC	Complete blood count
CBD	Common bile duct
CBDE	Common bile duct exploration
CBG	Capillary blood gas

Term	Meaning
CBI	Continuous bladder irrigation
CBS	Capillary blood sugar
CC	Chief complaint
CCK	Cholecystokinin
CCPD	Continuous cyclic peritoneal dialysis
CCU	Cardiac care unit
CCV	Critical closing volume
CBR	Complete bed rest
CF	Cystic fibrosis
CHF	Congestive heart failure
CI	Cardiac index
CKD	Chronic kidney disease
CLEA	Continuous lumbar epidural anesthesia

Term	Meaning
CLT	Clinical laboratory technician
CML	Chronic myelogenous leukemia
CN	Cranial nerves
CNS	Central nervous system
CO	Cardiac output
CO ₂	Carbon dioxide
COM	Chronic otitis media
COPD	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
CP	Chest pain
	Cleft palate
CPD	Cephalo-pelvic disproportion
CPK	Creatine phosphokinase
CPP	Cerebral perfusion pressure

Term	Meaning
CPR	Cardiopulmonary resuscitation
CRCL	Creatinine clearance
CRF	Chronic renal failure
CRT	Capillary refill time
CS	Central supply
CSD	Central service department
CSF	Cerebrospinal fluid
CSR	Central supply room
CT	Computed tomography
CVA	Cerebral vascular accident
	Costovertebral angle
CVP	Central venous pressure
CXR	Chest X-ray

D

Term	Meaning
D3	Distal third
D5W	5% dextrose in water
D&C	Dilation and curettage
DC	Discontinue or discharge
DIC	Disseminated intravascular coagulopathy
DIH	Direct inguinal hernia
DKA	Diabetic ketoacidosis
DL	Direct laryngoscopy

Term	Meaning
DM	Diabetes mellitus
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
DNR	Do not resuscitate
DOA	Dead on arrival



Context is important! Abbreviations can mean different things depending on usage and setting.

Depending on the context, **D3** can also refer to vitamin D₃ (cholecalciferol).

Term	Meaning
DOB	Date of birth
DOE	Dyspnea on exertion
DPT	Diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus
Dsg.	Dressing

Term	Meaning
DTR	Deep tendon reflexes
DVT	Deep vein thrombosis
DX	Diagnosis

E

Term	Meaning
EAA	Essential amino acids
EBL	Estimated blood loss
EBV	Epstein-Barr virus
ECCE	Extra capsular cataract extraction
ECF	Extracellular fluid
	Extended care facility
ECG or EKG	Electrocardiogram
ECT	Electroconvulsive therapy
EDC	Extensor digitorum communis
EDH	Epidural hematoma
EEA	End-to-end anastomosis
EEG	Electroencephalogram
EEL	Emergency exploratory laparotomy
EENT	Eye, ear, nose, and throat

Term	Meaning
EFAD	Essential fatty acid deficiency
EGD	Esophagogastroduodenoscopy
EMG	Electromyography
EMV	Eyes, motor, verbal response
ENT	Ear, nose, and throat
EOM	Extraocular muscles
EOMI	Extraocular movements intact
ER	Emergency room
ERCP	Endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography
ESR	Erythrocyte sedimentation rate
ESRD	End-stage renal disease
EtOH	Ethanol
ET or ETT	Endotracheal tube
EUA	Examination under anesthesia



Both **ECG** and **EKG** mean "electrocardiogram."

EKG comes from the original German spelling (elektrokardiogramm). You'll still see both in charts and orders, but they refer to the exact same test.

-F-

Term	Meaning
°F	Degree(s) Fahrenheit
F	Female
FBS	Fasting blood sugar
FBE	Foreign body extraction
FCU	Flexor carpi ulnaris
FDA	Food & Drug Administration
FDP	Flexor digitorum profundus
FDS	Flexor digitorum superficialis

Term	Meaning
FESS	Functional endoscopic sinus surgery
FEV	Forced expiratory volume
FF	Forced feeding/forced fluids
FFP	Fresh frozen plasma
FIA	Fistula in ano
FTSG	Full thickness skin grafting
Fx	Fracture
Fx urine	Fractional urine

-G-

Term	Meaning
gal	Gallon
GB	Gallbladder
GC	Gonorrhea
GCS	Glasgow Coma Scale
GERD	Gastroesophageal reflux disease
GETA	General endotracheal anesthesia
GFR	Glomerular filtration rate

Term	Meaning
GI	Gastrointestinal
GSW	Gunshot wound
gt	One drop
gtt	Multiple drops
GTT	Glucose tolerance test
GU	Genitourinary
Gyn.	Gynecology

-H-

Term	Meaning
H ₂ O	Water
Hb or HbG	Hemoglobin

Term	Meaning
HCG	Human chorionic gonadotropin
HCO ₃	Bicarbonate

Term	Meaning
HCT	Hematocrit
HD	Hemodialysis
HDL	High-density lipoprotein
HEENT	Head, eyes, ears, nose, throat
HOB	Head of bed
HPT	Hemoperitoneum
HR	Heart rate

Term	Meaning
hr	Hour
HS	Hour of sleep (bedtime)
ht	Height
HTN	Hypertension
HWB	Hot water bottle
Hyper	Above/high
Hypo	Below/low

I

Term	Meaning
I&O	Intake and output
I&D	Incision and drainage
IBG	Iliac bone graft
ICU	Intensive care unit
ICS	Intercostal space
IIH	Indirect inguinal hernia

Term	Meaning
IJ	Internal jugular
IOC	Intraoperative cholangiogram
Irr.	Irregular
Isol.	Isolation
IV	Intravenous

J

Term	Meaning
JVD	Jugular venous distension

Term	Meaning
JVP	Jugular venous pressure

K

Term	Meaning
K	Potassium

Term	Meaning
KUB	Kidneys, ureters, bladder

- L -

Term	Meaning
L	Liter
Lab	Laboratory
lb	Pound(s)
LDH	Lactate dehydrogenase
LE	Lower extremity
LFT	Liver function test
LLQ	Left lower quadrant
LOC	Level of consciousness

Term	Meaning
LP	Lumbar puncture
LPN	Licensed practical nurse
LUQ	Left upper quadrant
LVN	Licensed vocational nurse



Never use **lbs** as an abbreviation for "pounds."

Whether you're dealing with one pound (1 lb) or a hundred pounds (100 lb), there is never an s at the end of this abbreviation.

- M -

Term	Meaning
M	Male
Mat	Maternity
MCV	Mean corpuscular volume
MD	Medical doctor
Meas	Measure
Mec	Meconium
Med	Medicine

Term	Meaning
mEq	Milliequivalent
MI	Myocardial infarction
Min	Minute
mL	Milliliter
mn	Midnight
MRI	Magnetic resonance imaging
MSU	Midstream urine

- N -

Term	Meaning
N/V	Nausea/vomiting
NA	Nursing aide/assistant

Term	Meaning
Na	Sodium
NAD	No acute distress

Term	Meaning
NG tube	Nasogastric tube
NICU	Neonatal intensive care unit
NKA	No known allergies
Noct	At night
NP	Nurse practitioner

Term	Meaning
NPO	Nothing by mouth
NS	Normal saline
NSR	Normal sinus rhythm
nsy	Nursery
NTG	Nitroglycerin

O

Term	Meaning
O₂	Oxygen
OB	Obstetrics
	Obtunded
Obt	Obtained
OJ	Orange juice
OOB	Out of bed

Term	Meaning
OPD	Outpatient department
OR	Operating room
Ortho	Orthopedics
OT	Occupational therapy
	Oral temperature
oz	Ounce(s)

P

Term	Meaning
PACU	Postanesthesia care unit
Pc	After meals
Ped	Pediatrics
Per	By, through
PM	Afternoon
PMC	Postmortem care

Term	Meaning
PN	Pneumonia
po	By mouth
Post	After
Postop	Postoperative
Postop spec	After Surgery Urine Specimen
PP	Postpartum (after delivery)

Term	Meaning
PPBS	Postprandial blood sugar
PPH	Postpartum hemorrhage
Pre	Before
Preop	Before surgery
Preop spec	Urine specimen before surgery

Term	Meaning
PRN	Whenever necessary
	When required
PT	Physical therapy
Pt	Patient
pt	Pint

Q

Term	Meaning
q2h	Every two hours
q3h	Every three hours
q4h	Every four hours
q	Every
qam	Every morning
qh	Every hour

Term	Meaning
qhs	Every night at bedtime
qid	Four times a day
qs	Quantity sufficient
	As much as required
qt	Quart



The letter *q* means “every,” but the schedule isn’t always the same:

- **q4h** = every four hours around the clock (6 doses in 24 hours)
- **qid** = four times a day, often spaced during waking hours (e.g., 0800, 1200, 1600, 2000), not strictly every 6 hours

Some related *q* abbreviations like qd (every day) and qod (every other day) appear on many “do not use” lists because they’re easy to misread, so many facilities prefer writing out “daily” or “every other day.”

R

Term	Meaning
R	Rectal
Rm	Room
ROM	Range of motion

Term	Meaning
RR	Respiratory rate
RR or R Rm.	Recovery room
Rx	An ordered prescription or treatment

-S-

Term	Meaning
S&A	Sugar and acetone
S&K	Sugar and ketone
SOB	Shortness of breath

Term	Meaning
SPD	Special purchasing department
SpO ₂	Blood oxygen saturation
stat	As soon as possible, urgently

-T-

Term	Meaning
Temp	Temperature
tid	Three times a day

Term	Meaning
TKR	Total knee replacement
TLC	Tender loving care

-U-

Term	Meaning
U/A	Urinalysis
UE	Upper extremity

Term	Meaning
URI	Upper respiratory infection
UTI	Urinary tract infection

-V-Z-

Term	Meaning
VDRL	Test for syphilis
VS	Vital signs
w/o	Without
WBC	White blood cells

Term	Meaning
wt	Weight
XR	X-ray
YTD	Year to date
Zn	Zinc

The Joint Commission's "Do Not Use" List

Using standardized abbreviations and terminology helps ensure consistency and makes sure information is understood correctly by everyone involved. It clears up ambiguity, especially when dealing with symbols and abbreviations that can mean different things in different contexts.

Standard formats are also vital for numeric values (like medication doses and lab results) because they add precision and reduce the risk of interpretation errors.

Though the Joint Commission doesn't publish a list of approved abbreviations, they do provide a list of prohibited abbreviations, which are often misread and confused for other abbreviations or terms.

Term	Meaning	Use Instead
U	Unit	Write the term <i>unit</i>
IU	International unit	Write the term <i>international unit</i>
QD	Daily	Write the term <i>daily</i>
QOD	Every other day	Write the full phrase <i>every other day</i>
Trailing zero	1.0, 2.0, 3.0, etc.	Write the number with no trailing zero
No Leading Zero	.1, .2, .3, etc.	Always include leading zero
MS	Multiple sclerosis, morphine sulfate	Write the intended full term
MSO ₄	Morphine sulfate	Write the full term <i>morphine sulfate</i>
MgSO ₄	Magnesium sulfate	Write the full term <i>magnesium sulfate</i>

Common Abbreviation Errors

- **1.0 mg** → read as 10 mg
(results in a tenfold overdose)
- **.5 mg** → read as 5 mg
(results in a tenfold overdose)
- **MS** → confusion between morphine sulfate and magnesium sulfate
(results in the wrong medication administered)
- **QD** → confusion with QOD
(results in daily medication given every other day)
- **QOD** → confusion with QD
(results in alternating medication given every day)

Safe Documentation Tips

- Spell out medication names whenever possible
- Avoid ambiguous abbreviations
- Use leading zeros before decimals (0.3 mg)
- Remove trailing zeros after decimals (1 mg)
- Write directions clearly (e.g., "daily," "every other day")
- Reconfirm verbal or phone orders to ensure accuracy
- Use standardized facility-approved abbreviation lists