

## Translating medicaese: Loaded terms

- **abnormal**  
Carries the same kinds of negative values as “deviant” and “degenerate.” Just name the specific condition or give more details.
- **afflicted with, suffering with, sufferer, victim of**  
This is dramatic and pitying language. Ask yourself if it’s really accurate, really essential, and really the best way to put it.
- **breakthrough**  
Medical science is built on millions of small advancements, some of which have great significance nonetheless. In one perspective, it’s all breakthroughs, but *breakthrough* is a Hollywood term—it overpromises.
- **committed suicide**  
*Commit* implies a crime. Try “died by suicide.”
- **confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound**  
Without the wheelchair they wouldn’t be getting around at all. For people who can’t walk, wheelchairs are more freeing than confining.
- **cure**  
Be very careful about calling something a “cure” for the same reason you should be very careful about calling a document “final.”
- **differently abled**  
Can seem condescending or euphemistic. Ask whether it’s necessary to mention it at all – is their physical ability relevant to the story, really? And if it is, can you be more specific?
- **dramatic**  
This term is so imprecise and overused as to be meaningless. Don’t wave your hands; give specific details.
- **drug**  
Has negative associations with illegal drugs. To quote a real person I heard recently, “I don’t take drugs, I take medication.” *Medication* and *treatment* are less value-laden terms.
- **failed, treatment failure**  
Failure is bad; people and things that fail are seen as weak. Speak of the effects produced and not produced.
- **hero, brave, inspiring**  
Hollywood terms. People don’t get sick or injured so you can feel good. Sick people are not mountaineers or warriors; they didn’t choose it. Don’t be like that politician who told a vet he wished he could have gotten a purple heart.
- **hope**  
A heartstring-tugging word, great for narratives but not for factual details. Also: hope can be disappointed, and that’s bad.
- **lucky**  
Often used for someone who could have died, been hurt even worse, or gotten even sicker. Luckier still would have been not to get hurt or sick at all.
- **miracle**  
Medicine is science. It’s not a miracle. It may be wonderful, but it involves doctors and scientists, not deities, and healing is usually slow and difficult even with “miracles.”
- **natural**  
Implies that other things are unnatural, which has the whiff of evil. Do you even need this term? Is it accurate?
- **noncompliant**  
Treats the person like a child. If they’re not following treatment instructions, there must be a reason. What’s the obstacle?
- **normal**  
By implication, anything not normal is abnormal, which is a morally bad thing.
- **promising**  
This is a sales word for something that hasn’t delivered yet.
- **pure**  
Has obvious moral overtones. How relevant or accurate is it in the context?
- **struggling with, fighting**  
Are they, or are you attributing something to them? You make it sound like it’s a real difficulty and they may lose. It also has moral overtones.

## Things that mean something different in medicaese

Term	Everyday or sloppy use	Medical use
<b>abortion</b>	induced abortion	any premature end of pregnancy, including miscarriages
<b>acute</b>	bad	having a short course, peaking and resolving soon
<b>aggravate</b>	irritate	make worse
<b>aspiration</b>	hope	inhaling matter into the lungs; withdrawing fluid by a needle
<b>chemical</b>	bad toxic stuff	literally anything at the molecular level
<b>chronic</b>	dragged out	having a long course, not resolving (can have acute exacerbations)
<b>cloning</b>	making exact (or designer-modified) copies of people and animals	using part of an organism to make another organism that is genetically the same or nearly the same
<b>controversial</b>	makes people upset	scientists have published differing opinions and results
<b>GI</b>	soldier	gastrointestinal (pertaining to the gut)
<b>gut</b>	the middle of you	the digestive system from the stomach to the anus
<b>hernia</b>	slipped disc	protrusion through a rupture in any of many places (often in the abdomen)
<b>hypertension</b>	too much stress!	high blood pressure
<b>hypothesis</b>	wild-ass guess	possible explanation for a phenomenon, to be tested and confirmed or refuted
<b>in</b>	inside, into	the all-purpose medical preposition (because of the prevalent container metaphor)
<b>incompetent</b>	loser!	of an organ or organism, not functioning well (often in a specific respect)
<b>indicated</b>	pointed to	of a drug, officially approved for a specific use in a specific circumstance; in other contexts, suggested
<b>morbidity</b>	thinking about death	condition of being diseased; rate of disease in a population
<b>OCD</b>	fussy	a compulsive disorder where a person has to do or think about things in spite of wishing they couldn't
<b>paranoia</b>	fretfulness, concern about the opinions of others	believing others are plotting against you, and despising them for it
<b>patient</b>	a person being treated in a health care facility or by a doctor	any person subject to medical consideration
<b>population</b>	the people in a place	the group of people in a study or having a specific condition
<b>present (verb)</b>	show	appear to the doctor as
<b>prophylactic</b>	condom	anything done or used to prevent something
<b>retarded</b>	dumb	delayed
<b>risk</b>	danger	likelihood
<b>schizophrenia</b>	split personality	a wide variety of dissociative disorders
<b>significant</b>	noteworthy	of sufficient frequency or probability to be treated as real
<b>spastic</b>	uncontrolled	subject to spasms
<b>stat</b>	statistic	immediately
<b>theory</b>	just, like, your opinion, man	a well-constructed and tested explanation of an observed phenomenon
<b>ulcer</b>	hole in your stomach	eroded area of tissue in any of many places

## Greek and Latin lexical building blocks

Bolded terms are especially likely to get confused or be misleading.

- *adip*– ‘fat’
- *alb*– ‘white’
- *alges*– ‘pain’
- ***all*– ‘different’**
- *ambi*– ‘both sides’
- *amphi*– ‘both sides’
- *amyl*– ‘starch’
- *an*– ‘without’
- ***ana*– ‘back, again, up’**
- *angi*– ‘blood vessel’
- ***ankyl*– ‘bent’**
- ***ante*– ‘before’**
- ***anti*– ‘against, opposed to’**
- *apo*– ‘away from’
- *arseno*– ‘male’
- *articul*– ‘joint’
- *ather*– ‘fatty deposit’
- *aur*– ‘ear’
- *aut*– ‘self’
- *bar*– ‘heavy’
- *bis*– ‘twice’
- ***blast*– ‘germ, bud’**
- *blephar*– ‘eyelid’
- *brachy*– ‘short’
- *brady*– ‘slow’
- *bucc*– ‘cheek’
- *burs*– ‘bursa (fluid sac between bones)’
- *cac*– ‘bad’
- *cand*– ‘white’
- *capit*– ‘head’
- *carcin*– ‘cancer’
- *cardi*– ‘heart’
- *carp*– ‘wrist’
- *cata*– ‘down’
- *cav*– ‘hollow’
- *celer*– ‘fast’
- *cephal*– ‘head’
- *chlor*– ‘green’
- *cholecyst*– ‘gallbladder’
- *chrys*– ‘gold’
- *cili*– ‘eyelashes’
- *circum*– ‘around’
- *cirrh*– ‘red-orange’
- *cis*– ‘near side’
- *coel*– ‘hollow’
- *colp*– ‘vagina’
- *coron*– ‘heart’
- *cortic*– ‘outer layer’
- *cost*– ‘rib’
- *crani*– ‘skull’
- *cry*– ‘cold’
- *cut*– ‘skin’
- *cyan*– ‘blue’
- *cyst*– ‘bladder’
- *dactyl*– ‘finger’
- ***de*– ‘from, down, away from’**
- *dermat*– ‘skin’
- *dex*– ‘right side’
- ***di(s)*– ‘apart, separation’**
- ***di*– ‘twice’**
- ***dia*– ‘across’**
- *dif*– ‘apart’
- *diplo*– ‘double’
- ***dis*– ‘separation’**
- *dors*– ‘back’
- *dur*– ‘hard’
- ***dys*– ‘bad’**
- *ec*– ‘out, away’
- *ect*– ‘outer’
- *encephal*– ‘brain’
- *endo*– ‘inside’
- *enter*– ‘intestine’
- *epi*– ‘on’
- *episi*– ‘vulva’
- *erythr*– ‘red’
- *eu*– ‘good’
- *eury*– ‘wide’
- ***ex*– ‘out of, away from’**
- ***extra*– ‘outside’**
- *flav*– ‘yellow’
- ***front*– ‘forehead’**
- *galact*– ‘milk’
- *gastr*– ‘stomach’
- *gloss*– ‘tongue’
- *gluc*– ‘sweet’
- *glyc*– ‘sugar’
- *gnath*– ‘jaw’
- *grav*– ‘heavy’
- *hem-, hæm-* ‘blood’
- *hemi*– ‘half’
- *hepat*– ‘liver’
- ***heter*– ‘other’**
- ***hom(o)*– ‘same’**
- *home*– ‘similar’
- *hyp(o)*– ‘below normal’
- *hyper*– ‘beyond normal’
- ***hyster*– ‘uterus’**
- *iatr*– ‘medicine, physician, care’
- ***idio*– ‘self, own’**
- *infra*– ‘below’
- ***inter*– ‘between, among’**
- ***intra*– ‘within’**
- *ipsi*– ‘same’
- *irid*– ‘iris’
- *isch*– ‘restriction’
- ***iso*– ‘same, equal’**
- *kal*– ‘potassium’
- *kary*– ‘nucleus’
- *kerat*– ‘cornea, skin’
- *kyph*– ‘hump’
- *laryng*– ‘lower throat’
- *lat*– ‘wide’
- ***leuk*– ‘white’**
- *lev*– ‘left side’
- *lingu*– ‘tongue’
- *lip*– ‘fat’
- *liss*– ‘smooth’
- *lith*– ‘stone’
- *lys*– ‘dissolution’
- *macr*– ‘long’
- *mal*– ‘bad’
- ***mast*– ‘breast’**
- *mega*– ‘big’
- *melan*– ‘black’
- *men*– ‘month, menstrual cycle’
- *mening*– ‘membrane’
- *mer*– ‘part’
- *mes*– ‘middle’
- ***meta*– ‘after, beside, beyond’**
- *metr*– ‘uterine’
- *micr*– ‘small’

- *mon-* ‘single’
- *mort-* ‘dead’
- *my-* ‘muscle’
- *myel-* ‘marrow’
- *narc-* ‘numbness, sleep’
- *nas-* ‘nose’
- *necr-* ‘dead’
- *nephr-* ‘kidney’
- *noci-* ‘pain’
- *ocul-* ‘eye’
- *odont-* ‘tooth’
- *olig-* ‘few’
- ***onc-* ‘tumor’**
- ***onych-* ‘nail’**
- *oo-* ‘egg’
- *oophor-* ‘ovary’
- *or-* ‘mouth’
- *orchi-* ‘testes’
- *orth-* ‘normal, correct’
- *oste-* ‘bone’
- *ot-* ‘ear’
- *ov-* ‘egg’
- ***oxo-* ‘oxygen’**
- ***oxy-* ‘sharp’**
- *pachy-* ‘thick’
- *pan-* ‘all’
- *papill-* ‘nipple’
- *para-* ‘alongside’
- *parvo-* ‘small’
- ***path-* ‘disease’**
- *pauci-* ‘few’
- *ped-* ‘foot’
- *per-* ‘through’
- *peri-* ‘around’
- *phag-* ‘eating’
- *pharyng-* ‘upper throat’
- *phleb-* ‘vein’
- *phon-* ‘sound’
- *phos-* ‘light’
- *phot-* ‘light’
- *phren-* ‘mind’
- *phyt-* ‘grow’
- *plan-* ‘flat’
- *platy-* ‘flat’
- *pleio-* ‘multiple, excessive’
- *pleur-* ‘rib’
- *pneumon-* ‘lungs’
- *poikil-* ‘irregular’
- ***poly-* ‘many, much’**
- *porphyr-* ‘purple’
- *presby-* ‘old age’
- *prim-* ‘first, foremost’
- ***pro-* ‘before’**
- *proct-* ‘anus’
- *prosop-* ‘face’
- *pseud-* ‘false’
- *psor-* ‘itching’
- *pulmon-* ‘lungs’
- *pyel-* ‘pelvis’
- *pylor-* ‘gate (between stomach and intestines)’
- *pyr-* ‘fever’
- *radic-* ‘root, beginning’
- ***retro-* ‘backward’**
- *rhabd-* ‘rod-shaped’
- *rhin-* ‘nose’
- *salping-* ‘uterine tubes’
- *sarc-* ‘flesh, muscle’
- *schist-* ‘split’
- *schizo-* ‘split, double-sided’
- *scler-* ‘hard’
- *scoli-* ‘twisted’
- *scoto-* ‘darkness’
- *semi-* ‘half’
- *sial-* ‘saliva, salivary gland’
- *sigmoid-* ‘S-curve’
- *sinistr-* ‘left side’
- *som-, somat-* ‘body’
- *somn-* ‘sleep’
- *splen-* ‘spleen’
- *spondyl-* ‘spine, vertebrae’
- *squam-* ‘scale, skin flake’
- *sten-* ‘narrow’
- *steth-* ‘chest’
- *sthen-* ‘strength’
- ***stom-* ‘mouth, hole’**
- ***stomat-* ‘mouth’**
- ***sub-* ‘under’**
- ***super-* ‘over’**
- *tachy-* ‘fast’
- *tetan-* ‘rigid, tense’
- *thely-* ‘female’
- *thorac-* ‘chest cavity’
- *thromb-* ‘clot’
- *thym-* ‘emotion’
- *ton-* ‘tension, tone’
- *tort-* ‘twisted’
- *trans-* ‘far side’
- *trich-* ‘hair’
- ***ultra-* ‘beyond’**
- *ungui-* ‘nail’
- *varic-* ‘swollen or twisted vein’
- *vas-, vascu-* ‘blood vessel’
- *ventr-* ‘stomach’
- *vir-* ‘male’
- *xanth-* ‘yellow’
- *xen-* ‘foreign, different’
- *-algia* ‘pain’
- *-ary* ‘pertaining to’
- *-ase* ‘enzyme’
- *-asis* ‘condition, formation, presence’
- *-asthenia* ‘weakness’
- *-cele* ‘pouching, cyst’
- *-centesis* ‘puncture for aspiration’
- *-cide* ‘killing’
- *-clast* ‘break’
- *-crine* ‘secretion’
- *-desis* ‘binding’
- *-dipsia* ‘thirst’
- *-drome* ‘course’
- *-dynia* ‘pain’
- *-ectasia, -ectasis* ‘expansion, dilation’
- ***-ectomy* ‘cutting out, cutting up’**
- *-emesis* ‘vomiting’
- *-emia* ‘blood condition’
- *-gen* ‘born in, from’
- *-gen* ‘of a certain kind’
- *-genic* ‘producing’
- *-gnosis* ‘knowledge’
- *-iasis* ‘condition, formation, presence’
- *-icle* ‘small’
- *-ism* ‘condition’
- ***-itis* ‘inflammation’**
- ***-itus* (actually *-us* noun suffix plus a root ending in *-it*; don’t confuse with *-itis*)**
- *-leptosis, -lepsy* ‘seizure’
- *-lysis* ‘destruction’
- *-lytic* ‘dissolver’

- *-malacia* 'softening'
- *-oid* 'resembling'
- *-ole* 'small'
- *-opsy* 'examination'
- *-osis* 'diseased condition'
- ***-ostomy* 'cutting a hole'**
- ***-otomy* 'incision, removal'**
- *-paresis* 'slight paralysis'
- *-pathy* 'disorder'
- *-penia* 'deficiency'
- *-pepsia* 'digestion'
- ***-pes* 'foot'**
- *-phage* 'eater'
- *-phagy* 'eating'
- *-philia* 'attraction'
- *-phobia* 'aversion'
- *-plasia* 'growth, formation'
- *-plasty* 'repair'
- *-plegia* 'paralysis'
- *-plexy* 'stroke, seizure'
- *-poiesis* 'production'
- *-ptosis* 'downward movement'
- *-rrhage* 'burst forth'
- *-rrhagia* 'rapid flow'
- ***-rrhea* 'flow'**
- *-rrhexis* 'rupture'
- ***-sclerosis* 'hardening'**
- *-spadia* 'slit, fissure'
- ***-stalsis* 'contraction'**
- ***-stasis* 'stopping, staying'**
- ***-staxis* 'dripping, trickling'**
- *-stenosis* 'narrowing'
- ***-stomy* 'cutting a hole'**
- ***-tension* 'pressure'**
- ***-tomy* 'incision, removal'**
- ***-tony* 'tension'**
- *-tripsy* 'crushing'
- ***-trophy* 'nourishment, growth'**
- *-ula, -ule* 'small'
- ***-version* 'turning'**