

Understanding Medical Terminology Can Help You Get More Out of Your Healthcare



Fully understanding your medical condition is crucial for actively participating in your own healthcare decisions. When you understand your health well, you are better equipped to work with healthcare providers, make informed choices, and play an active role in your own care.¹

Medical terminology is the specialized language and jargon used by healthcare professionals, which can often be complex and hard to understand. It's not essential to learn medical terminology to be able to communicate more effectively with your doctors or better understand your diagnoses and treatment options, but knowing a little medical terminology can be helpful. The following are ways you can still get the most out of your healthcare without a medical background.

For your next consultation, we recommend you:

1. Ask questions.
2. Take notes
3. Do your research.



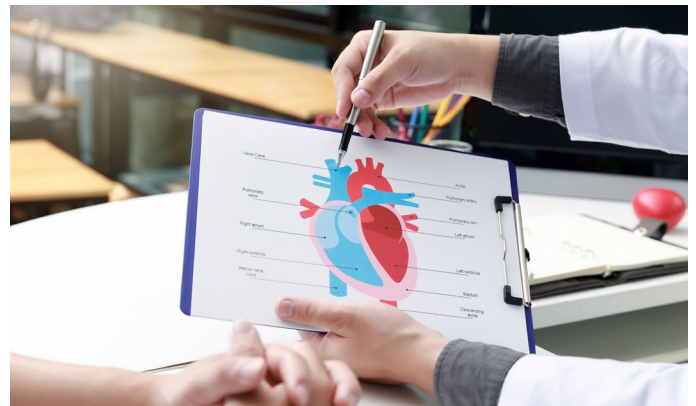
Ask Questions

When speaking with your doctor, don't hesitate to ask questions if any of the information or terminology is unfamiliar or unclear. Ask your doctor for a "plain-language" explanation if you need one.²

Also, you can ask targeted questions that can help you better understand your condition, symptoms, medications, and treatment plans.

Some questions you could ask during your healthcare visit:

- Does this condition, symptom, or medication have another name?
- Do you have any visual aids (diagrams, charts, or anatomical models) to help me understand this procedure/problem?
- Could you provide an example to help me understand better?
- Can you explain the potential risks and benefits of this treatment?
- What treatment options are available, and what are the side effects?



Take Notes

Taking notes during the visit is a good way to retain important information so you can refer back to it later. Using a notebook (which you would use only for your healthcare information) or a specially designed resource such as the Houston HeartReach Passport (which can be downloaded and printed) can help you keep a record of your medical information that you can bring to later appointments.

Things you should take note of:

- Words and terms that you do not recognize
- Any instructions your doctor gives you
- Things your doctor is asking you to look out for or keep track of (such as new symptoms, side effects, and your vitals)



Online Resources

The Texas Heart Institute Heart Information Center - www.texasheart.org/HIC



Cardiovascular Glossary - <https://www.texasheart.org/heart-health/heart-information-center/topics/a-z/>



Straight Talk Newsletter by Dr. Stephanie Coulter - www.texasheart.org/StraightTalk



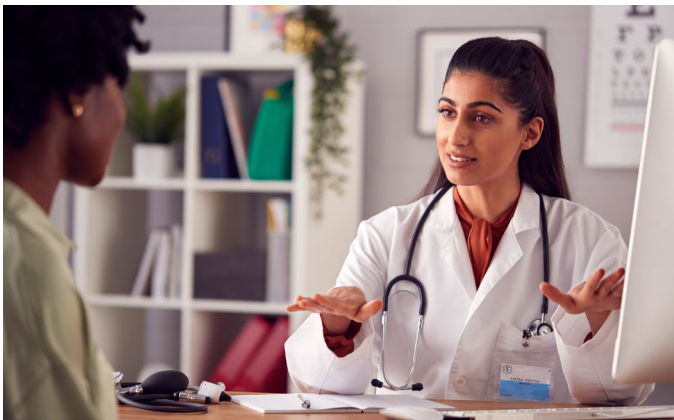
Find a Doctor - www.texasheartmedical.org



Do Your Research

You can improve your understanding by looking for information from reliable sources. This information can help you have more useful discussions with your healthcare providers.³ Use trusted online resources, such as the websites of well-known hospitals and medical organizations, to find more information about your condition. *But don't rely on this information alone; you need to consult with your healthcare professionals to confirm and interpret the information you have found.*

Seeking a second opinion from another qualified healthcare provider can also help you better understand your condition.



References

1. Nicholson Thomas, E., Edwards, L., & McArdle, P. (2017). Knowledge is Power. A quality improvement project to increase patient understanding of their hospital stay. *BMJ quality improvement reports*, 6(1), u207103.w3042. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjquality.u207103.w3042>
2. Graham, S., & Brookey, J. (2008). Do patients understand?. *The Permanente journal*, 12(3), 67-69. <https://doi.org/10.7812/TPP/07-144>
3. Fage-Butler, A.M. and Nisbeth Jensen, M. (2016), Medical terminology in online patient-patient communication: evidence of high health literacy?. *Health Expect*, 19: 643-653. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.12395>

Disclaimer

The information in *Understanding Medical Terminology Can Help You Get More Out of Your Healthcare* has been taken from many sources. It is meant to give you information about the potential benefits of the asking questions. This information should not be used as medical advice. Please talk to your provider for individualized recommendations and instructions.