



Memorizing Medical Terminology

The vast majority of health care programs require students to know the correct spelling and pronunciation of medical terminology including their basic definition. This can range from hundreds to thousands of medical terms with varying levels of complexity. Although memorization at this level may seem like no simple task, the following strategies can help:

- 1) Understand the definition through common root words, prefixes and suffixes. Recognizing these can greatly enhance memorization because it will help you define terms by applying the meaning of the prefixes/suffixes with the root word. For example, the term **meningitis** contains the root word "**meninges**" and the suffix "**itis**." By knowing these two terms independently, we can conclude that it refers to inflammation of the meninges.
- 2) Use flash cards with one side containing the term (with the correct pronunciation and spelling) and on the flip side, a brief definition of the term.
- 3) An organized list of items is easier to memorize than an unorganized list. If possible, group or categorize medical terminology based on a commonality – for example, you may group anatomical terms with the respective system of the body they may be associated with (ex. Corpus callosum and hippocampus with the nervous system).
- 4) Try to make connections and associations with terms. For example, if your vision is nearsighted, you may associate a term like myopia with your own vision.
- 5) Learn the terms at a consistent pace and on a regular basis. Studies suggest you are much more likely to retain information learned in class if you review the material within 24 hours of first being exposed to the information.
- 6) Be an active learner, and not a passive one – rather than simply reading and writing the terms, apply them actively throughout the day by: discussing the definitions with others (classmates, friends), using the terms in a sentence on your own and with others, and teaching the terms to others.
- 7) Download apps on your smartphone. Several Apple and Android apps for medical terminology are available and can help you memorize terms while you are on the go!
- 8) Practice, practice, practice!