

Symptom-to-Terminology Translator

Plain Language → Correct Medical Terms · Clinical Reasoning Tool 1 of 3

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This translator bridges everyday patient language and clinical documentation. The left column shows what a patient might say; the center shows the correct medical term(s); the right column explains the word-building logic so you can decode similar terms independently.

Cardiovascular & Circulatory		
Patient Says...	Medical Term(s)	Word-Building Logic
"My heart is racing"	Tachycardia	tachy- (fast) + cardi/o (heart) + -ia (condition)
"My heart is beating really slowly"	Bradycardia	brady- (slow) + cardi/o + -ia
"My heart is fluttering / skipping"	Palpitations; arrhythmia	a- (without) + rhythm + -ia; palpitare (Latin: to throb)
"I have high blood pressure"	Hypertension	hyper- (above) + tens/o (pressure) + -ion
"I have low blood pressure"	Hypotension	hypo- (below) + tens/o + -ion
"My legs are swollen"	Peripheral edema	edema = excess fluid; peripheral = outer extremities
"I have chest pain when I walk"	Angina pectoris / exertional angina	angina (Latin: choking) + pectoris (of the chest)
"I had a heart attack"	Myocardial infarction (MI)	my/o (muscle) + cardi/o + -al; infarction = tissue death from ischemia
"I have a blood clot in my leg"	Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)	thromb/o (clot) + -osis (abnormal condition)
"I bruise very easily"	Easy ecchymosis / purpura	ecchymosis: ec- (out) + chym/o (juice/blood) + -osis

Respiratory		
Patient Says...	Medical Term(s)	Word-Building Logic
"I can't catch my breath"	Dyspnea	dys- (difficult) + -pnea (breathing)
"I stop breathing at night"	Sleep apnea	a- (without) + -pnea; sleep = temporal qualifier
"I'm breathing really fast"	Tachypnea	tachy- (fast) + -pnea
"I'm coughing up blood"	Hemoptysis	hem/o (blood) + ptysis (spitting)
"I wheeze when I breathe"	Bronchospasm; wheezing	bronch/o (bronchus) + spasm (sudden contraction)
"My chest is tight"	Chest tightness; bronchospasm	Often associated with asthma or angina
"I have a collapsed lung"	Pneumothorax	pneum/o (air/lung) + thorax (chest); air in pleural space
"I snore loudly and feel tired"	Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA)	obstructive = physical blockage of the airway
"I'm coughing all the time"	Chronic cough; pertussis	per- (through) + tussis (cough); pertussis = whooping cough
"I have fluid in my lungs"	Pulmonary edema	pulmon/o (lung) + -ary; edema = excess fluid

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Gastrointestinal & Digestive		
Patient Says...	Medical Term(s)	Word-Building Logic
"I'm throwing up blood"	Hematemesis	hemat/o (blood) + emesis (vomiting)
"I can't swallow"	Dysphagia	dys- (difficult) + -phagia (swallowing)
"My stomach hurts"	Abdominal pain; gastralgia	gastr/o (stomach) + -algia (pain)
"I have heartburn"	Gastroesophageal reflux (GERD)	gastr/o + esophag/o + -al; reflux = backward flow
"I can't go to the bathroom"	Constipation; obstipation	constipatio (Latin: to press together)
"I have black, tarry stools"	Melena	melas (Greek: black); indicates upper GI bleed
"I'm having diarrhea"	Diarrhea	dia- (through) + -rrhea (flow/discharge)
"I'm vomiting"	Emesis / nausea and vomiting (N/V)	emesis (Greek: to vomit)
"My skin is yellow"	Jaundice / icterus	jaune (French: yellow); icterus = Greek for jaundice
"My belly is distended"	Abdominal distension; ascites	ascites = fluid in peritoneal cavity; distension = bloating
"I have blood in my stool"	Hematochezia (bright red) / melena (dark)	hemat/o + chezia (defecation); bright red = lower GI

Urinary & Renal		
Patient Says...	Medical Term(s)	Word-Building Logic
"It burns when I pee"	Dysuria	dys- (painful/difficult) + -uria (urine condition)
"I pee all the time"	Polyuria; urinary frequency	poly- (many/much) + -uria
"I can't pee"	Urinary retention; anuria	an- (without) + -uria
"I pee very little"	Oliguria	olig/o (few/scanty) + -uria; < 400 mL/day
"There's blood in my urine"	Hematuria	hemat/o (blood) + -uria
"I have to get up at night to pee"	Nocturia	noct/o (night) + -uria
"I leak urine"	Urinary incontinence	in- (not) + continere (Latin: to hold); loss of bladder control
"I have a kidney stone"	Nephrolithiasis; urolithiasis	nephro (kidney) + lith/o (stone) + -iasis (condition)
"My kidneys are failing"	Renal failure; nephropathy	ren/o (kidney) + -al; nephro + -pathy (disease)

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Neurological		
Patient Says...	Medical Term(s)	Word-Building Logic
"I fainted"	Syncope	syn- (together) + koptein (Greek: to cut off); LOC = loss of consciousness
"I had a stroke"	Cerebrovascular accident (CVA)	cerebr/o + vascul/o (vessel) + -ar; accident = sudden event
"I can't speak properly"	Aphasia (no speech) / dysarthria (slurred)	a- + phasia (speech); dys- + arthr/o (joint) = motor speech
"I'm dizzy"	Vertigo; dizziness	vertere (Latin: to turn); sensation of spinning
"I have a severe headache"	Cephalgia; migraine	cephal/o (head) + -algia (pain)
"My hands are numb / tingling"	Paresthesia; peripheral neuropathy	para- (abnormal) + esthesia (sensation)
"I'm having a seizure"	Seizure; convulsion; epilepsy	epi- (upon) + lepsia (Greek: to seize)
"I can't move my arm/leg"	Hemiplegia; paresis	hemi- (half) + -plegia (paralysis); paresis = partial paralysis
"I'm confused"	Altered mental status (AMS); delirium	delirium: de- (away) + lira (Latin: furrow/track)
"I'm forgetting things"	Cognitive impairment; dementia	de- (away) + mens (Latin: mind) + -ia

Musculoskeletal		
Patient Says...	Medical Term(s)	Word-Building Logic
"My joints ache"	Arthralgia; arthritis	arthr/o (joint) + -algia (pain); -itis = inflammation
"My muscles are weak"	Myasthenia; muscle weakness	my/o (muscle) + asthenia (weakness)
"I broke a bone"	Fracture (Fx)	fractura (Latin: to break); classified by type and location
"My back hurts"	Dorsalgia; lumbago; back pain	dors/o (back) + -algia; lumb/o (lower back)
"My shoulder popped out"	Shoulder dislocation	dis- (apart) + location; glenohumeral joint displacement
"I pulled a muscle"	Muscle strain	overstretching of muscle fibers; vs. sprain = ligament
"My bones are brittle"	Osteoporosis	oste/o (bone) + por/o (porous) + -osis (condition)
"My joints are stiff in the morning"	Morning stiffness; rheumatoid arthritis (RA)	rheuma (Greek: flow); inflammatory joint disease
"I have carpal tunnel"	Carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS)	carp/o (wrist) + -al; compression of median nerve

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Dermatological (Skin)		
Patient Says...	Medical Term(s)	Word-Building Logic
"I have a rash"	Dermatitis; exanthem; urticaria	derm/o + -itis (inflammation); urticaria = hives
"My skin is really itchy"	Pruritus	prurire (Latin: to itch); symptom, not a diagnosis
"I have a blister"	Vesicle (small) / bulla (large)	vesica (Latin: bladder); fluid-filled skin lesion
"I have a mole that's changing"	Dysplastic nevus; melanoma r/o	nev/o (mole/birthmark); melanoma = malignant melanocyte tumor
"My wound isn't healing"	Chronic wound; ulceration	ulcer = tissue erosion through epidermis into dermis
"I have dry, flaky skin"	Xerosis; psoriasis; eczema	xer/o (dry) + -osis; psoriasis from psora (Greek: itch)
"I have a red, warm, swollen area"	Cellulitis; erythema	cell/o + -itis; erythema = erythr/o (red) + -ema (condition)

Eyes & Vision		
Patient Says...	Medical Term(s)	Word-Building Logic
"My vision is blurry up close"	Hyperopia (farsightedness)	hyper- (beyond) + op/o (eye/vision) + -ia
"My vision is blurry far away"	Myopia (nearsightedness)	my/o (to close) + -opia; shortsightedness
"I see halos around lights"	Glaucoma; early cataract	glauk/o (gray-green); increased intraocular pressure
"My eye is red and painful"	Conjunctivitis; uveitis	conjunctiv/o + -itis; uve/o (uvea) + -itis
"I'm losing my side vision"	Peripheral vision loss; glaucoma	peripheral = peri- (around) + phery (carrying)
"I have double vision"	Diplopia	dipl/o (double) + -opia (vision condition)

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Endocrine & Metabolic		
Patient Says...	Medical Term(s)	Word-Building Logic
"I'm always thirsty"	Polydipsia	poly- (many) + dips/o (thirst) + -ia; classic DM symptom
"I'm always hungry"	Polyphagia	poly- + -phagia (eating); also a DM symptom
"I'm always tired / fatigued"	Fatigue; asthenia; hypothyroidism r/o	a- (without) + sthenos (strength)
"I gained a lot of weight"	Weight gain; obesity; hypothyroidism r/o	BMI ≥ 30 = obesity; hypo- + thyroid + -ism
"I lost a lot of weight without trying"	Unexplained weight loss; cachexia	cachexia: kak/o (bad) + hexis (condition)
"My blood sugar is high"	Hyperglycemia	hyper- + glyc/o (sugar) + -emia (blood condition)
"My blood sugar is low"	Hypoglycemia	hypo- + glyc/o + -emia
"I have an overactive thyroid"	Hyperthyroidism	hyper- + thyr/o + -ism; excess T3/T4 production
"I have an underactive thyroid"	Hypothyroidism	hypo- + thyr/o + -ism; insufficient T3/T4

General / Systemic		
Patient Says...	Medical Term(s)	Word-Building Logic
"I have a fever"	Pyrexia; febrile state	pyr/o (fire/heat) + -exia; febrile from febris (Latin: fever)
"I have chills"	Rigors; chills	rigor (Latin: stiffness); shivering with fever
"I'm losing weight"	Weight loss; cachexia; anorexia	anorexia: an- (without) + orexis (appetite)
"I'm swollen all over"	Generalized edema; anasarca	ana- (throughout) + sarx (flesh); systemic fluid overload
"I'm really pale"	Pallor; anemia	pallor (Latin: paleness); anemia = a- + hem/o + -ia
"I have night sweats"	Nocturnal diaphoresis	noct/o + diaphoresis: dia- (through) + phorein (to carry)
"I feel faint/lightheaded"	Pre-syncope; orthostatic hypotension	ortho- (upright) + static; BP drops on standing
"I'm in pain all over"	Diffuse pain; fibromyalgia; myalgia	fibr/o + my/o + -algia; widespread musculoskeletal pain

Quick-Reference: Symptom Clusters & What They Suggest

These symptom clusters help connect patient presentations to likely body systems and the terminology used to document them.

Symptom Cluster	Likely System	Key Terms to Know
Chest pain + SOB + diaphoresis + arm pain	Cardiovascular (cardiac emergency)	MI, angina, ACS, dyspnea, diaphoresis
Fever + productive cough + SOB + crackles or rales	Respiratory (pulmonary infection)	Pneumonia, bronchitis, consolidation, dyspnea
Nausea + RUQ pain + fever + jaundice	Hepatobiliary (gallbladder / liver)	Cholecystitis, cholelithiasis, jaundice, Murphy's sign
Dysuria + frequency + urgency + hematuria	Urinary (UTI or kidney stone)	Cystitis, pyelonephritis, nephrolithiasis, hematuria

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Symptom Cluster	Likely System	Key Terms to Know
Sudden unilateral weakness + facial droop + aphasia	Neurological (stroke / CVA)	CVA, hemiplegia, aphasia, dysarthria, FAST exam
Polyuria + polydipsia + polyphagia + weight loss	Endocrine (Diabetes mellitus)	Hyperglycemia, DM, polydipsia, glycosuria, HbA1c
Joint pain + morning stiffness + symmetric swelling	Musculoskeletal (Rheumatoid arthritis)	Arthritis, synovitis, erosion, autoimmune, RF+
Rash + pruritus + urticaria after exposure	Dermatological / Immunological (allergic reaction)	Urticaria, pruritus, angioedema, anaphylaxis
Abdominal pain + rebound tenderness + fever	GI/Surgical (peritonitis / appendicitis)	Peritonitis, appendicitis, guarding, rebound, rigidity
Palpitations + weight loss + heat intolerance	Endocrine (Hyperthyroidism)	Hyperthyroidism, thyrotoxicosis, tachycardia, exophthalmos