

All directional terms are used in reference to the **anatomical position**: body erect, feet together, palms facing forward, eyes looking straight ahead.

Directional Terms

Term	Meaning	Example in Practice
Anterior (ventral)	Toward the front of the body	The sternum is anterior to the heart.
Posterior (dorsal)	Toward the back of the body	The spine is posterior to the stomach.
Superior (cranial)	Toward the head / upper body	The heart is superior to the liver.
Inferior (caudal)	Away from the head / lower body	The stomach is inferior to the lungs.
Medial	Toward the midline of the body	The nose is medial to the eyes.
Lateral	Away from the midline	The ears are lateral to the nose.
Proximal	Closer to the point of origin/trunk	The elbow is proximal to the wrist.
Distal	Farther from the point of origin/trunk	The wrist is distal to the elbow.
Superficial (external)	Toward the surface	The skin is superficial to muscle.
Deep (internal)	Away from the surface	The femur is deep to the thigh muscles.
Ipsilateral	Same side of the body	The right arm and right leg are ipsilateral.
Contralateral	Opposite side of the body	Left eye and right hand are contralateral.
Bilateral	Both sides of the body	Bilateral knee replacements.
Unilateral	One side of the body	Unilateral facial droop (stroke sign).
Afferent	Carrying toward a center (inward)	Afferent nerves carry impulses to CNS.
Efferent	Carrying away from a center (outward)	Efferent nerves carry impulses from CNS.

Body Planes

Plane	Description	Divides Body Into
Sagittal	Vertical cut parallel to the midline	Left and right portions
Midsagittal (median)	Vertical cut exactly at the midline	Equal left and right halves
Frontal (coronal)	Vertical cut perpendicular to sagittal	Anterior (front) and posterior (back)
Transverse (axial/horizontal)	Horizontal cut parallel to the ground	Superior (upper) and inferior (lower)
Oblique	Diagonal cut at an angle	Unequal diagonal sections

Body Cavities

Cavity	Location	Major Organs Contained
Cranial	Skull	Brain
Vertebral (spinal)	Spinal column	Spinal cord
Thoracic	Chest, above diaphragm	Heart, lungs, esophagus, trachea
Pleural (x2)	Within thoracic cavity	Each lung

Cavity	Location	Major Organs Contained
Pericardial	Within thoracic cavity	Heart
Abdominal	Below diaphragm, above pelvis	Stomach, intestines, liver, spleen, kidneys
Pelvic	Within pelvic bones	Bladder, rectum, reproductive organs
Abdominopelvic	Combined abdominal + pelvic	All abdominal and pelvic organs

Abdominopelvic Regions (9 Regions)

Region	Location	Key Organs
Right Hypochondriac	Upper right	Right lobe of liver, gallbladder, right kidney
Epigastric	Upper center	Stomach, pancreas, duodenum, liver
Left Hypochondriac	Upper left	Spleen, left kidney, stomach, pancreas tail
Right Lumbar (lateral)	Middle right	Ascending colon, right kidney, small intestine
Umbilical	Middle center	Transverse colon, small intestine, aorta
Left Lumbar (lateral)	Middle left	Descending colon, left kidney, small intestine
Right Iliac (inguinal)	Lower right	Cecum, appendix, right ovary/tube
Hypogastric (pubic)	Lower center	Bladder, uterus, sigmoid colon
Left Iliac (inguinal)	Lower left	Sigmoid colon, left ovary/tube

Patient Positions

Position	Description	Common Use
Supine	Lying on back, face up	Physical exams, surgery, CPR
Prone	Lying on abdomen, face down	Back exams, certain surgeries
Lateral recumbent	Lying on side	Enemas, obstetric exams
Fowler's	Semi-sitting (45–60°)	Respiratory distress, feeding
Semi-Fowler's	Partially sitting (30–45°)	Post-op, cardiac patients
Trendelenburg	Supine, feet elevated	Shock, lower-extremity surgery
Reverse Trendelenburg	Supine, head elevated	Reflux, head/neck surgery
Lithotomy	Supine, legs raised in stirrups	Pelvic/gynecological exams
Sims'	Left lateral, right knee flexed	Rectal exams, enemas