

Medical language is concise and meaningful to those with a medical background, but filled with words and phrases that are difficult and often impossible for non-scientists and the general public to understand. At the heart of the informed consent process is the necessity to convey information to potential study participants in language that they can understand, to help ensure that they have a good idea of what they will experience if they choose to participate in a study. Consent documents should be written so that someone with an eighth grade reading level can understand the information. This list of suggested terminology may help you do that.

A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W |

Abate	To lessen or decrease
Abdomen	Stomach or belly
Ablate or Ablation	Remove or Removal
Abrasion	Area where skin or other tissue is scraped away
Acquired	Anything that is not present at birth but develops some time later
Acuity	Clearness, keenness, especially of vision and airways
Acute	New, recent, sudden
Adhesion	Tissue stuck together
Adjuvant	Helpful, assisting, aiding
Adjuvant treatment	Added or additional treatment
Adverse event or effect	Side effect
Aerosolized	A vapor or mist to be inhaled
Afebrile	Without fever
Alopecia	Hair loss
Allergic reaction	Rash, trouble breathing
Allergy	Oversensitivity to a substance
Alzheimer's disease	A brain disorder characterized by difficulty thinking and remembering
Ambulatory	Able to walk
Amenorrhea	No period
Amnesia	Loss of memory
Anaphylaxis/Anaphylactic Shock	A potentially life-threatening allergic reaction including difficulty breathing and a drop in blood pressure
Analgesic	Pain reliever/pain relieving
Anemia	Low red blood cell count
Anesthetic/Anesthesia	A drug or combination of drugs that reduces the ability to feel pain
Anesthetic (general)	A drug used to decrease or eliminate the feeling of pain by putting you to sleep

Anesthetize	Make numb; put to sleep
Angina/Angina Pectoris	Pain resulting from lack of blood to the heart
Angioplasty	Surgery to open a narrow or blocked blood vessel
Anorexia	Loss of appetite
Anterior	In front
Antibody	A substance produced by the body to fight infection
Antigen	A substance that stimulates the production of an antibody
Antiseptic	A substance used to stop or slow down the growth of germs
Aphasia	Not able to speak or write and not able to understand spoken or written words
Arm	One part of a multiple-part study
Arrhythmia	Irregular heartbeat
Artery	Blood vessel
Asthenia	Loss of energy, weakness
Aspirate	To remove fluid from a body cavity or cyst
Assay	Lab test
Assess	To look at
Assessment	Survey, questionnaire
Asymptomatic	Without symptoms
Ataxia	Unsteady movement
Atrophy	Wasting away, or decrease in size

Bacteria	Germs
Basal acid output	Acid produced by the stomach before food or medication
Benefit	An advantage
Benign	Not cancerous; usually without serious consequences; will not cause harm
Beta blocker	A drug used to slow down the heart
Bilateral	Both sides of the body
Biopsy	Removal and examination of a small piece of tissue or organ
Bolus	An amount given all at once
Bone density	Bone thickness, hardness
Bradycardia	Slow heartbeat
Broad spectrum	Has a broad range of effectiveness; works on a number of different things
Bronchospasm	Problems breathing caused by narrowing of the airways

Capillary	Tiny blood vessel
Carcinogenic	Capable of causing cancer
Carcinoma	Type of cancer
Cardiac	Involving the heart
Cardiac catheterization	Procedure in which a small tube, called a catheter, is inserted through the blood vessels into the heart
CAT (CT) scan	A computerized x-ray examination
Catheter	Flexible plastic tube inserted for taking or giving fluids
Central line	A thin plastic tube placed into a large vein near the heart
Central nervous system (CNS)	The brain and spinal cord
Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF)	Fluid surrounding the brain and the spinal cord
Cessation	Stopping
Chemotherapy	Treatment of with drugs
Chronic	Continuing for a long time
Claustrophobic	Fear of being enclosed in a small space
Clinical	Pertaining to medical care
Clinical Trial	Experimental research study with volunteers
Clot	The solid state of blood; blood that has thickened
Cognitive/Cognition	Thinking; knowing; awareness
Colonoscopy	Procedure in which a long tube with a special camera at the end is inserted in the rectum to look in the large intestine
Coma	Unconscious state
Comply	Obey; Follow instructions
Congenital	Inherited; occurring before birth
Contusion	Bruise
Contraindicated	Undesirable; inadvisable; indicated against
Contrast material	Special dye put into blood vessels or an area of the body to make it show up better in an X-ray picture
Controlled Trial	An experimental research study in which the experimental treatment or procedure is compared to the usual or standard treatment or procedure
Coronary	Involving the heart
Convulsions	Seizures
Creatinine clearance	Blood test to see how well your kidneys are working
Culture	Test for the presence of germs or infection

Cumulative	Total
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Demographic	Information about your lifestyle and general characteristics
Deteriorate	To get worse
Diagnosis	Identification of an illness
Diagnostic instrument/assessment	Questions about moods, feelings, or behaviors to help identify a problem or disease
Dialysis	The process of cleansing or filtering the blood by passing it through a special machine
Diastolic Blood Pressure	The second number of a blood pressure reading; blood pressure during the time the heart relaxes
Dilate	To make bigger; to stretch or enlarge
Diplopia	Double vision
Distal	The more or most distant of two (or more) things
Distended	Bloated; swollen; inflated
Diuretic	A water pill or drug that causes increase in urination
Doppler	Sound waves
Double blind study	No one knows which drug or treatment the participant is receiving.
Duodenum	Beginning of the small intestine
Dysfunction	Problem; state of improper function
Dyspepsia	Gas; upset stomach
Dysplasia	Abnormal cells
Dyspnea	Difficulty breathing; shortness of breath
Dysrhythmia	Abnormal or irregular heart beat

Echocardiogram	Procedure using sound waves to take pictures of the chambers of the heart and measure its pumping strength
Edema	Swelling; Increased fluid
Efficacy	Effectiveness; how well something works
Electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG)	A recording of the heart's electrical activity; measurement of a heartbeat
Electrodes	Wire
Electroencephalogram (EEG)	A recording of the brain's electrical activity
Electrophysiology Study	Heart rhythm study
Elucidate	To make clear; to find out
Embryo	Unborn baby

Endoscopy	A procedure in which a thin, flexible tube with a light at its end is passed through the mouth or rectum to allow inspection of the gastrointestinal tract
Endorphin	A substance made by the body to stop pain
Enzyme	A substance produced by the body to assist in breaking down chemicals
Enzyme abnormality	Blood test result that suggests abnormal organ function or injured cells
Eradicating	Getting rid of (such as disease)
Esophagus	Swallowing tube between throat and stomach
Exclusion criteria	Reasons that someone cannot be in a study
Experimental	Term used to describe a therapy, treatment or procedure that is different, not proven or has not yet been proven to work and to be safe
Excrete/Excreted	Make/Made; Give off; Put out
Extravasate	To leak outside of a blood vessel

Failed therapy	A therapy that did not help
Fast	Do not eat or drink
Fatigue	Tired; tiredness
Febrile	Feverish
Fetus	Unborn baby
Fibrillation	Irregular beat of the heart muscle
Fibrous	Having many layers of fibers
Flatulence	Pass gas
Flourescein	A dye that is injected into an arm vein to help examination of the blood vessels inside the eye
Flushing	Warmth or reddening of the skin
Fracture	Break

Gastric	Relating to the stomach
Gastrointestinal	Relating to the stomach and intestines
Gastrointestinal Reflux Disease	Heartburn
Gene therapy	Gene therapy is a technique for correcting defective genes responsible for disease development. Usually a "normal" gene is used to replace an "abnormal" or disease-causing gene.
GERD	Heartburn
General anesthesia	A state of unconsciousness controlled

	by an anesthesiologist to prevent or lessen pain
Genetics	Traits you inherit from your parents
Glucose	Sugar

Hematoma	A bruise; a black and blue mark
Hematologist	A doctor who treats blood disorders
Hemodynamic	Measurement of blood flow
Hepatic	Relating to the liver
Hepatitis	Liver inflammation or swelling
Heparin lock	A needle placed in the arm with blood thinner to keep blood from clotting
Hives	An itchy, bumpy skin rash
Holter monitor	A small machine that records heart beats
Hyperglycemia	High blood sugar
Hypertension	High blood pressure
Hypodermic	Under the skin
Hypoglycemia/Hypoglycemic	Low blood sugar
Hypotension	Low blood pressure
Hypoxia	Low oxygen level in the blood
Hysterectomy	Removal of the womb

Idiopathic	Of unknown cause
Immobilization	Causing or making something unable to move
Immobilized	Unable to move
Immunological	Relating to the body's ability to fight infection
Immunosuppressive	A drug which suppresses the body's immune response
Immunotherapy	Giving drugs to help the body's immune (protective) system; usually used to destroy cancer cells
Implantation	To have a device placed inside the body
Implanted	Placed in the body
Incision	Cut
Indicated	Necessary; suggested
Induce	Cause
Indwelling catheter	A thin, flexible plastic tube that remains in a vein or artery a period of time
Inert	Not active
Inert substance	Has no known effect on a disease
Infectious disease	A disease which can be transmitted from one person to another

Inflamed	Swollen; red; warm
Inflammation	Swelling which is painful, red, and warm
Inflate/Inflation	Fill with air
Infusion	Slow drip of fluid into a vein
Ingestion	Eating; taking by mouth
Inhibitor	A drug that stops something
Insomnia	Trouble sleeping
Intake	What you eat or drink
Intensity	Degree; amount
Intermittent	Occurring off and on; alternately stopping and starting
Intramuscular	In a muscle
Intramuscular injection (IM)	Putting something into a muscle with a needle
Intravenous/Intravenously (IV)	In a vein
Intravenous infusion	Putting something into a vein or blood vessel with a needle
Intubate	The placement of a tube into the airway
Invasive procedure	A procedure that involves opening or cutting the skin
Ischemia	Decreased oxygen in a tissue (usually because of decreased blood flow)
Isolated	Separated; closed off

Jaundice	Yellow discoloration of the skin and eyes
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Keloid	A scar that keeps growing or getting thicker
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Lactating	Making breast milk
Laparotomy	Surgery to examine the abdominal organs
Lesion	An area of tissue that has been injured; a wound, sore, rash, or boil
Lethargy	Sleepiness
Leukocyte	Blood cell that fights infection
Libido	Sex drive
Liver function tests	Blood tests to check for liver problems or see how well your liver is working
Localized	Limited to one area of the body
Local anesthetic	Medicine to numb an area of the body
Lumbar puncture	Spinal tap; a needle is inserted between the bones of the spine to put

	in a drug or take a sample of spinal fluid
Lumbosacral	Lower back
Lymphocyte	A type of white blood cell important in the body's defense against infection

Maintenance dose	The usual dose of drug or medicine
Malaise	A vague feeling of bodily discomfort; feeling bad or "lousy"
Malfunction	Condition in which something is not functioning properly
Malignancy	Cancer
Malignant	Cancerous
Manifest/Manifested	Show/Showed
Medical device	An article that does not achieve any of its principal intended purpose through chemical action within the body or on the body
Meningitis	Infection around the brain
Menstrual Cycle	Period
Metabolism	The energy the body uses when it works the way the body breaks down food or drug
Metastasize	Spread
Metastasized	Cancer that has spread to other parts of the body
Minimal	Slight
Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)	Pictures of the inside of the body taken with a large magnet and radio waves
Mobility	Ease of movement
Monitor	Check on; keep track of; watch carefully
Morbidity	Undesired result or complication
Mortality	Death or death rate
Mucosa/Mucosal	The lining inside an organ
Myalgia	Muscle aches
Myocardial infarction (MI)	Heart attack

Nasal	Relating to the nose
Nasal congestion	Stuffy nose
Nasogastric tube (NG tube)	A flexible tube inserted through the nose or mouth into the stomach
Nausea	Feeling sick to one's stomach or about to throw up
Necrotic tissue	Dead tissue
Negative test result	The disease, process, infection or

	bacteria being tested for is not found; a normal test result
Neurological	Having to do with the nervous system
Neurological examination	Examination of the brain, spinal cord and reflexes
Neurotransmitter	Chemical messenger in the nervous system
New indication	New use
Non-invasive	Not breaking, cutting or entering the skin

Obese	Extremely overweight
Occult blood test	A test for blood in the stool
Occlusion	Blockage
Oncology	The study of tumors or cancer
Open-label study	The investigator and study participant will know which drug, procedure or device the participant gets
Optimal/Optimum	Best, most favorable or desirable
Oral	Spoken; taken by mouth
Osteoarthritis	Bone and joint pain
Over-the-counter	Drugs that you can buy without a prescription

Palliate/Palliation	To partially treat a disease; to relieve symptoms or effects of a disease
Palpate	To touch or feel
Palpitation	Irregular or “skipped” heartbeat that you can feel
Paresthesia	Tingling or numbness in an area
Pathogenesis	The initial cause of a disease
Perception	One’s view or opinion
Percutaneous	Through the skin
Perforate/Perforation	Hole; tear
Peripheral	Away from the center
Peritoneal cavity	Abdominal cavity
Peritoneum	The membrane that lines the abdominal cavity and covers most of the organs
PET scan (positron emission tomography)	A special camera that helps doctors see how well the internal parts of the body are working
Pharmacokinetics	The process by which a drug is absorbed and eliminated by the body

Pharmacological	Having to do with a drug
Pharmacology of a drug	How your body handles a drug
Phlebitis	Inflammation of a vein
Phlebotomy	Getting blood from a vein
Placebo	A pill that looks like the study pill but does not have any of the drug in it
Placenta	A temporary organ that joins a mother and a fetus
Plasma	The liquid part of the blood
Pneumonia	Lung infection
Pneumothorax	Collapsed lung
Polyp	A lump of tissue that develops on certain organs
Positive test result	The disease, process, infection or bacteria being tested for is found; an abnormal test result
Positive history	Something in your medical past
Posterior	Back or behind
Postpartum	After childbirth; just after delivery
Premature	Earlier than expected; earlier than usual
Prenatal	Before birth
Prior	Before
Prognosis	Expected or probably outcome of a disease; chance of recovery
Prone	Lying face down; lying on your stomach
PRN	As needed
Prophylactic/Prophylaxis	A preventive measure; a drug given or something done to prevent a disease, condition or infection
Prospective study	Study following the participants forward in time
Protocol	Study plan; describes the study and how it will be done
Proximal	The closer or closest of two or more items
Pulmonary	Having to do with the lungs
Puncture	Make a hole
Pyelogram	X-ray pictures of the kidneys

Quality of life	How satisfied you are with your life; how you feel and what you are able to do day to day
Quantify	Measure

Radioactive isotope	A chemical or substance that gives off
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	energy
Random	By chance
Randomized	By chance, like the flip of a coin or pulling numbers out of a hat
Recuperate	Get better
Recur	To happen again; to come back
Recurrence	The return of a sign, symptom or disease
Regimen	Pattern of administering treatment
Rehabilitation	The process of working to recover skills to as near normal levels as possible
Relapse	A disease that comes back or returns
Remission	Temporary or permanent disappearance of the signs and symptoms of cancer or other disease
Renal	Having to do with the kidneys
Resect	Remove surgically
Respiratory	Having to do with breathing
Retrospective study	A study looking at past experience

Saline	Salt water
Secondary amenorrhea	Missed menstrual period
Secretion	A fluid made by the body
Sedate/sedation	To make sleepy
Sedative	A drug that calms, makes less anxious or makes you sleepy
Sepsis	Infection in the bloodstream
Sequentially	In a row
Serum	The clear liquid that can be separated from clotted blood
Shock	A critical condition caused by a sudden drop in blood flow through the body; reaction of the whole body to severe physical or emotional injury
Shunt	To move a body fluid from one place to another; a tube that carries body fluid from one area to another
Single blind study	The participant will not know which treatment or drug will be given, but the investigator will.
Sleep apnea	When you temporarily stop breathing while you are sleeping
Somatic	Having to do with the body
Somnolence	Sleepiness
Sputum	Thick saliva
Standard of care/Standard care	Usual treatment
Stenosis	Narrowing of a valve, duct or other

	vessel
Stent	Small tube that keeps a blood vessel open
Subcutaneous	Under the skin
Subsequent	Later; following; as a result of
Superficial	Near the surface; minor
Supine	Lying on your back; lying face up
Sutures	Stitches
Symptomatic	Having symptoms; having signs of disease or illness
Symptoms	Signs of disease or illness
Syncope	Fainting; lightheadedness
Systemic	Involving the whole body
Systolic Blood Pressure	The first number of a blood pressure reading; the blood pressure when the heart is contracting

Tachycardia	Fast heartbeat
Therapeutic dose	Amount of medicine needed to treat a condition or disease
Third party payors	Health insurance carrier; Medicare; Medicaid
Thrombosis	Clotting
Tinnitus	Ringing in the ears
Titrate/Titration	Adjust the amount of drug up or down
Tolerance	Decrease in response to a drug after a period of time
Topical	Applied to the surface; on the skin
Topical anesthetic	Applied to an area of the skin to reduce pain to the area
Toxicity	The degree to which a drug can cause harm
Trachea	Windpipe
Transdermal	Through or by the skin
Trauma	Injury
Treatment Cycle	Pattern of how and when drugs and treatment will be given
Tremor	Shakiness
Trial	Research study
Triage	The process of sorting people based on their need for immediate medical attention
Triglyceride	Fat in the blood
Triglyceride level	Amount of one fat in the blood
Tubal ligation	Surgically tying the fallopian tubes to permanently prevent pregnancy

Ureter	A tube that carries urine from the kidneys to the bladder
Urethra	A tube that carries urine from the bladder to outside of the body
Urinalysis	Test or examination of the urine
Ultrasound	Examination using sound waves

Vaginitis	Infection in the vagina, or birth canal
Vasospasm	Narrowing of blood vessels due to a spasm of vessel walls
Vein	Blood vessel
Venipuncture	To put a needle into a vein to draw blood
Verbal	Spoken
Vertigo	Dizziness
Void	Urinate

Waive	Give up
Well tolerated	Does not cause many side effects
Withdraw	Cancel; stop study participation