Latin for medicine Verba medica

Just for learning: this sheet teaches words, not medicine. It isn't medical advice.

Why Latin and Greek: the names of body parts come mostly from Latin, and the official list of them, Terminologia Anatomica, still gives every name in Latin, next to the English. Words for diseases and operations come mostly from Greek. That's why the kidney gives both renal, from Latin, and nephritis, from Greek.

Saying it: three ways you'll hear

Classical

as Romans said it: ae like eye, c always k, v like w

vertebrae WER-te-brye

bronchī BRON-kee

Church Latin

the Italian way: ae like the e in bed, v like v

vertebrae VER-te-bre

bronchī BRON-kee

English clinics

the English way, the one colleagues will use

vertebrae VUR-tuh-bree

bronchi BRONG-kye

Honestly: in hospitals where people speak English, nearly every term is said the English way, and that's fine. Say it like the people around you. The Latin way helps you spell it and see how a word is built.

Where the Latin stress goes: two syllables, stress the first. Longer words look at the one before last: long, stress it, ab-DŌ-men, ar-TĒ-ri-a; short, go one further back, MUS-cu-lus.

The lines over vowels: anatomy books and charts print Latin without them. This sheet adds them to dictionary words and phrases so you can see the long vowels, and that matters: os is bone, ōs is mouth. Plurals and structure names are spelt as you'll see them in English texts.

One, more than one: the endings on charts

Ending	One and more than one	The ending is
-us to -i	**bronchus** bronchi · **nucleus** nuclei · **alveolus** alveoli	Latin, mostly masculine
-a to -ae	**vertebra** vertebrae · **scapula** scapulae · **fibula** fibulae	Latin, feminine
-um to -a	**ovum** ova · **bacterium** bacteria · **septum** septa	Latin, neuter
-is to -es	**diagnosis** diagnoses · **metastasis** metastases · **testis** testes	most -sis words are Greek
-ix, -ex to -ices	**appendix** appendices · **cervix** cervices · **cortex** cortices	Latin
-on to -a	**ganglion** ganglia · **mitochondrion** mitochondria	Greek
-ma to -mata	**carcinoma** carcinomata · **stoma** stomata · **sarcoma** sarcomata	Greek
watch out	**corpus** corpora body · **viscus** viscera inner organ · **foramen** foramina hole in a bone	

In English: many of these also take an English plural: carcinomas, stomas, appendixes. Both forms are right; the Latin or Greek one sounds more formal. Virus just becomes viruses.

The body, head to toe Corpus hūmānum

Two roots for one part: often Latin gives the plain adjective and Greek gives the words for diseases and specialities: cor and cardi-, rēn and nephr-, pulmō and pneum-, hēpar and hepat-, cutis and derm-. Learn both.

Latin m f n	Means	Latin gives	Greek gives
caput, capitis	head	occipital (occiput, back of the head)	cephal-: cephalic
collum, -ī	neck	torticollis, a twisted neck	none: cervical is Latin too, from cervīx
thōrax, thōrācis	chest	pectoral, from pectus, chest	thōrax is itself Greek: thoracic
abdōmen, abdōminis	belly	abdominal	lapar-: laparoscopy
manus, -ūs	hand	manual	chir-: chiropractic
pēs, pedis	foot	pedal	pod-: podiatry
cor, cordis	heart	precordial, in front of the heart	cardi-: cardiac
pulmō, pulmōnis	lung	pulmonary	pneum-: pneumonia
hēpar, hēpatis	liver	none: the Latin word iecur is rarely used	hepat-: hepatitis
rēn, rēnis	kidney	renal	nephr-: nephritis
cutis, cutis	skin	cutaneous	derm-: dermatitis
os, ossis	bone	osseous	oste-: osteoporosis
musculus, -ī	muscle (a little mouse)	muscular	my-: myalgia
nervus, -ī	nerve	nervous	neur-: neurology
vēna, -ae	vein	venous	phleb-: phlebitis
artēria, -ae	artery	arterial	artēria is itself Greek: arteriosclerosis
oculus, -ī	eye	ocular	ophthalm-: ophthalmology
auris, auris	ear	aural	ot-: otitis
nāsus, -ī	nose	nasal	rhin-: rhinitis
ōs, ōris	mouth	oral	stomat-: stomatitis
lingua, -ae	tongue	sublingual	gloss-: glossitis
dēns, dentis	tooth	dental	odont-: orthodontics

Two words called os: os, ossis, short o, is bone: ossa, bones, and osseous. ōs, ōris, long o, is mouth: oral, and per ōs, by mouth. The of form tells them apart.

Two kinds of ped-: pedal comes from Latin pēs, foot, but paediatric comes from Greek pais, child. Hēpar, liver, is a Greek word that anatomy uses as Latin.

Where things are Ubi est?

Start from the anatomical position: the body stands facing you, arms by the sides, palms forward. Every direction is measured from there, and right and left always mean the patient's, not yours.

Pair	Means	A real name, as anatomy books print it
anterior / posterior	in front / behind	**arteria cerebri anterior** anterior cerebral artery
superior / inferior	above / below	**vena cava superior** superior vena cava
medialis / lateralis	nearer the midline / further from it	**musculus vastus medialis** vastus medialis, on the inner side of the thigh
dexter / sinister	right / left, the patient's	**ventriculus dexter** right ventricle of the heart
proximalis / distalis	nearer the trunk / further away	**articulatio radioulnaris proximalis** proximal radioulnar joint, at the elbow
internus / externus	inside / outside	**arteria carotis interna** internal carotid artery
superficialis / profundus	near the surface / deep	**musculus flexor digitorum superficialis** the surface muscle that bends the fingers
major / minor	bigger / smaller	**musculus pectoralis major** pectoralis major, the big chest muscle
longus / brevis	long / short	**musculus fibularis longus** fibularis longus, a long muscle of the lower leg

Reading a long name

The noun comes first: musculus, muscle; arteria, artery; vena, vein. Then the words that describe it, and their ending matches the noun: arteria carotis interna, but a muscle would be internus.

cerebri
of the brain (cerebrum)

digitorum
of the fingers or toes (digitus)

abdominis
of the belly (abdomen)

capitis
of the head (caput)

The of words: a word in the middle often means of something. Digitorum is of the fingers, so musculus flexor digitorum is the bender of the fingers.

Big, middle, small: three muscles of the buttock: **musculus gluteus maximus**, the biggest, **musculus gluteus medius**, the middle one, **musculus gluteus minimus**, the smallest. You meet the same words in many other names.

Prescriptions and charts Recipe

Safety first: many of these are now discouraged because they get misread. In the US, The Joint Commission's do not use list bans q.d. and q.o.d., every day and every other day, which get mistaken for each other and for q.i.d. Safety lists also warn about h.s., and o.d., which means once a day in some places and right eye in others. Always follow your hospital's or your country's rules, and when in doubt, write it out in words.

On the chart	Latin	Means
Rx	recipe	take: the sign that starts a prescription
p.o.	per ōs	by mouth
NPO	nīl per ōs	nothing by mouth, for example before an operation
b.i.d.	bis in diē	twice a day
t.i.d.	ter in diē	three times a day
q.i.d.	quater in diē	four times a day
q.h.	quāque hōrā	every hour; q.4h. is every 4 hours
p.r.n.	prō rē nātā	as needed (word for word, for the thing that has come up)
a.c.	ante cibum	before food
p.c.	post cibum	after food
stat.	statim	at once, now
ad lib.	ad libitum	as much as wanted
gtt.	guttae	drops
b.d.	bis diē	UK twice a day, the usual UK form
o.n.	omnī nocte	UK every night
~~q.d.~~	quāque diē	do not use every day: write daily instead
~~h.s.~~	hōrā somnī	do not use at bedtime, but also read as half-strength

Rx: the sign at the top of a prescription stands for recipe, take, the first word of old prescriptions. A prescription told the pharmacist: take this, mix it, give it.

In diē, in a day: bis is twice, ter three times, quater four times. Quāque means every: quāque hōrā, every hour. In the UK you'll more often see b.d., bis diē, than b.i.d.

Building words Verba compōnere

Read a long word from the end: the ending says what kind of thing it is, the front says where. Peri-card-itis: around, heart, inflammation, so an inflamed sac around the heart. Mixed words are normal: appendicitis is a Latin word with a Greek ending.

-itis Greek **inflammation**
appendicitis, inflamed appendix

-ectomy Greek **cutting out**
tonsillectomy, taking out the tonsils

-otomy Greek **cutting into**
tracheotomy, an opening into the windpipe

-algia Greek **pain**
neuralgia, nerve pain

-osis Greek **a condition, often a disease**
thrombosis, a blood clot forming

-oma Greek **a swelling, a tumour**
lipoma, a lump of fat cells

hyper- Greek **over, too much**
hypertension, high blood pressure

hypo- Greek **under, too little**
hypoglycaemia, low blood sugar

tachy- / brady- Greek **fast / slow**
tachycardia, a fast heartbeat

peri- Greek **around**
pericardium, the sac around the heart

sub- Latin **under**
subcutaneous, under the skin

supra- Latin **above**
suprarenal, above the kidney

inter- Latin **between**
intercostal, between the ribs (costa, rib)

intra- Latin **inside**
intramuscular, into the muscle

pre- Latin **before**
prenatal, before birth

post- Latin **after**
postoperative, after an operation

Phrases you'll meet

in situ
in place: carcinoma in situ has not spread

in vitro
in glass: in a dish or test tube

in vivo
in the living body

per os
by mouth: p.o. on a chart

post mortem
after death

rigor mortis
the stiffness of the body after death

primum non nocere
first, do no harm

cor pulmonale
the right side of the heart strained by lung disease

situs inversus
organs mirrored left to right

delirium tremens
shaking delirium, in alcohol withdrawal

Primum non nocere: it's often credited to Hippocrates, but the Latin words are many centuries later than him. His writings say something close in Greek: help, or at least do no harm.

Practice Exercitātiō

6 · twenty lines · answers at the bottom

How: make the plural, say what the structure is in English, or decode the abbreviation. Say each answer out loud, then check the small print at the bottom.

1 Plural of **fungus**

2 Plural of **fistula**

3 Plural of **atrium**

4 Plural of **prognosis**

5 Plural of **apex**

6 In English **arteria cerebri posterior**

7 In English **vena cava inferior**

8 In English **musculus vastus lateralis**

9 In English **ventriculus sinister**

10 In English **articulatio radioulnaris distalis**

11 In English **arteria carotis externa**

12 In English **musculus flexor digitorum profundus**

13 In English **musculus pectoralis minor**

14 In English **musculus fibularis brevis**

15 Decode **t.i.d.**

16 Decode **p.r.n.**

17 Decode **a.c.**

18 Decode **NPO**

19 Decode **stat.**

20 Decode **p.o.**

Answers

1 fungi
2 fistulae
3 atria
4 prognoses
5 apices
6 posterior cerebral artery
7 inferior vena cava
8 vastus lateralis, on the outer side of the thigh
9 left ventricle of the heart
10 distal radioulnar joint, at the wrist
11 external carotid artery
12 the deep muscle that bends the fingers
13 pectoralis minor, the smaller chest muscle
14 fibularis brevis, a short muscle of the lower leg
15 ter in diē, three times a day
16 prō rē nātā, as needed
17 ante cibum, before food
18 nīl per ōs, nothing by mouth
19 statim, at once
20 per ōs, by mouth

Meet a word you don't know? In Kitsumi, hover any word in subtitles to see what it means.