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The Medical Library Association

has developed this pamphlet to help you decipher some common heart disease related "medspeak" terms. You'll also find some tips on how to identify quality health care information on the Internet.

MLA MEDICAL LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION

Quality information for improved health

www.mlanet.org

Deciphering Heart Disease Medspeak

A ACE INHIBITORS – Angiotensin Converting Enzyme (ACE) Inhibitors, a class of drugs used in the treatment of heart disease to help keep blood vessels dilated (open) to improve blood flow.

ANGIOGRAPHY – an x-ray examination of blood vessels in which a temporary dye is injected into the arteries to allow any blockages and blood flow to be seen during an x-ray, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or other diagnostic procedure.

ANGIOPLASTY – an invasive procedure for treating blocked or diseased arteries in which a catheter (tube) with a small balloon at the tip is inserted into the artery. The balloon is then inflated at the narrow portion of the artery to compress the fatty tissue and widen the artery for increased blood flow.

ANGIOTENSIN – a chemical produced by the body that causes the narrowing of blood vessels and an increase in blood pressure

ARRYTHMIA – an irregular heartbeat

ARTERY – a blood vessel that carries blood away from the heart to the body's organs and tissues

ATRIAL FIBRILLATION – a chaotic rhythm of the heart that causes the two upper chambers of the heart (atria) to beat rapidly and irregularly. Only part of the contraction reaches the lower chamber (ventricles). The condition can cause an increased risk of blood clots and stroke.

ATRIUM – the upper, smaller heart chambers (left and right) which receive the blood returning to the heart

B BETA BLOCKERS – drugs often used to treat hypertension (high blood pressure) to reduce the force of the heart rate

BLOOD THINNERS – drugs used to prevent blood clots

BLOOD VESSELS – flexible tubes (arteries, veins and capillaries) within the body that circulate blood

C CALCIUM CHANNEL BLOCKER – a drug that lowers blood pressure by preventing calcium from entering the cells of the heart and vessel walls

CARDIOMYOPATHY – a disease of the heart muscle that causes it to weaken and lose its full pumping force

CARDIOMYOPLASTY – a surgical procedure for heart failure that takes muscles from the abdomen or back and wraps them around the heart. The added muscle is used to increase the heart's pumping action.

CHOLESTEROL – a soft, waxy substance found in the nervous system, skin, muscle, liver, intestines, and heart. It is made by the body and also obtained from animal products in the diet.

CHOLESTEROL (HDL) – the cholesterol in high-density lipoproteins; often labeled the 'good' cholesterol because a high level of it seems to protect against heart disease. [An HDL 60 mg/dL or above is the optimal level.]

CHOLESTEROL (LDL) – the cholesterol in low-density lipoproteins; often labeled the 'bad' cholesterol because when too much of it circulates in the blood, it can slowly build up in the inner walls of the arteries that feed the heart and brain. [An LDL of less than 100 mg/dL is the optimal level.]

CONGENITAL HEART DISEASE – any heart condition present at birth

CONGESTIVE HEART FAILURE (CHF) – the inability of the heart to pump blood efficiently through the blood vessels. This sometimes leads to a build up of fluids in the body.

CORONARY ARTERY BYPASS – a surgical procedure to restore blood to the heart in which blood flow is re-routed around a diseased or blocked coronary artery.

CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE – a build up of fatty tissue that causes narrowing of the arteries, reducing blood flow to the heart. The lack of oxygen to the heart can lead to a heart attack.

D **DIASTOLIC BLOOD PRESSURE** – the pressure of blood against the artery walls when the heart is at rest. This is the bottom or second number in reading blood pressure. A blood pressure reading below 120/80 is considered normal.

DIGOXIN (or digitalis) – a medication used to treat congestive heart failure or atrial fibrillation. It makes the contraction of the heart muscle stronger, slows the rate of the heartbeat and helps remove extra fluid from body tissues.

DYSPNEA – shortness of breath

DYSRHYTHMIA – an abnormal heart beat

E **ECHOCARDIOGRAPHY** – an ultrasound of the heart used to diagnose abnormal heart conditions

EDEMA – swelling of tissue or organs caused by excess fluid

EJECTION FRACTION – the amount of blood pumped out of a ventricle during each heartbeat. It is often expressed as a percentage and evaluates how well the heart is pumping.

Rx Riddles Solved!

Doctors, pharmacists and others use a medical “shorthand.” What difference does it make if your doctor’s handwriting isn’t legible? It might mean the difference between AP and ap!

āā	- ana, so much of each
a.c.	- ante cibum, before meals
ad effect	- until effective
ad lib	- as much as desired
AP	- ante partum, before childbirth
ap	- ante prandium, before dinner
aq	- aqua, water
bid	- bis in die, twice each day
ċ	- cum, with
dbl	- double
h.s.	- hora somni, at bedtime
i.d.	- idem, the same
IM	- intramuscular
k	- constant
mb	- misce bene, mix well
MDR	- minimum daily requirement
MED	- minimum effective dose
npo	- nil per os, nothing by mouth
ō	- nono, without
O.D.	- oculus dexter, right eye
O.S.	- oculus sinister, left eye
ṑ	- post, after
per os	- by mouth
prn	- pro re nata, as needed
qh	- quaque hora, every hour
qid	- quater in die, four times each day
qv	- quantum vis, as much as you wish
Rx	- recipe, prescription
STAT	- statim, immediately
sum	- sumat, let it be taken
T or T°	- temperature
t	- time
tid	- ter in die, three times each day
ut dict	- ut dictum, as directed
vid	- see
w	- weight
w/	- with
X	- unknown factor

ELECTROCARDIOGRAM (EKG or ECG) – a test that records the electric currents of the heart to detect abnormalities

ENDOCARDITIS – inflammation of a heart valve or the lining of the heart, often caused by a bacterial infection

H HEART ATTACK – (sometimes called a coronary) damage to the heart that occurs when blood flow is interrupted

HEART DISEASE – used to generally describe a heart disorder, including high blood pressure, coronary artery disease and clogged arteries

HYPERTENSION – term for abnormally high blood pressure

HYPOTENSION – term for abnormally low blood pressure

I INVASIVE – a medical procedure that involves entry into the body via a needle, tube or hand

ISCHEMIC – the state of having a lack of blood flow to a part of the body, caused by partial or total blockage of an artery

L LEFT-VENTRICULAR HEART FAILURE (LVF) – results from damage to the heart's left-side chambers

LIPOPROTEIN – a molecule that is a combination of lipid (fat) and protein. Lipoproteins are the form in which lipids are transported in the blood.

M MUGA (Multiple Gated Acquisition) Scan – a non-invasive test in which a radioactive substance is injected into the bloodstream and scanned in order to assess the function of the heart. A camera measures the size and shape of the ventricles.

MYOCARDIAL INFARCTION – a heart attack

MYOCARDITIS – inflammation of the myocardium (the heart's muscular wall)

P PULMONARY EDEMA – fluid accumulation in the lungs, usually caused by heart failure

R RIGHT-VENTRICULAR HEART FAILURE (RVF) – results from damage to the heart's right-side chambers

S STRESS TEST – sometimes called an exercise test or treadmill test, a way to test how well the heart works as it requires more oxygen to function. EKG readings can determine irregularities.

SYSTOLIC BLOOD PRESSURE – pressure of blood against artery walls when the heart contracts. This is the top or first number in reading blood pressure. A blood pressure reading below 120/80 is considered normal.

V VASOCONSTRICTOR – a substance used to narrow the blood vessel to increase resistance to blood flow and raise the blood pressure

VASODILATION – a substance used to widen the blood vessel, increase blood flow and lower blood pressure

VEIN – a blood vessel that carries blood back to the heart from the various parts of the body

VENTRICLE – one of the two (right and left) lower chambers of the heart. The right ventricle pumps blood to the lungs, and the left ventricle sends blood carrying oxygen to the rest of the body.

Diagnosing Heart Disease Web sites

The Medical Library Association (MLA) finds the following Web sites particularly useful for understanding heart disease. For a current list, visit <http://www.mlanet.org>.

American Heart Association

<http://www.americanheart.org>

Web site features: heart attack warning signs, latest news, disease statistics, nutrition tips, medical encyclopedia, Spanish language information and links to additional resources.

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/index.htm>

Web site features: diseases and conditions index, clinical trials information, health assessment tools, healthy recipes and educational tutorials.

National Women's Health Information Center

<http://www.4women.gov/faq/heartdis.htm>

Web site features: frequently asked questions and answers for women about heart disease.

NOAH: New York Online Access to Health

<http://www.noah-health.org/en/blood/disease/>

Web site features: definitions, care and treatment, causes and risk factors, warning signs, diagnostic test information and descriptions about surgical procedures.

MEDLINEPlus® from the National Library of Medicine

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/heartdiseases.html>

Web site features: latest news, overviews, diagnosis/symptoms, treatment, prevention, alternative therapy, clinical trials, research, genetics and glossaries.

The Consumer and Patient Health Information Section (CAPHIS) of MLA evaluates Web sites based on the following criteria: credibility, sponsorship/authorship, content, audience, currency, disclosure, purpose, links, design, interactivity and disclaimers. See the consumer health library directory at <http://caphis.mlanet.org/consumer/consumerSpecific.html>.



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