

Medical Acronyms, Abbreviations and Symbols

Each facility will have a list of approved acronyms, abbreviations, and symbols. Please ask to review this list at each facility. An acronym or abbreviation may have more than one meaning. Evaluate the acronym or abbreviation in context.

Some acronyms, abbreviations, and symbols have become unacceptable to use due to their high propensity for error. Some are included in this list, followed by (unacceptable abbreviation). At the end of this file is a table of unacceptable abbreviations that the *Joint Commission for Accreditation of Healthcare Facilities* requires for all healthcare institutions. Each facility is also supposed to add additional “do not use” acronyms, etc. Do NOT use these acronyms, abbreviations, or symbols. You will still see them in charts (old habits die hard) so you need to know them. In addition, drug names are not to be abbreviated with the exception of ASA, HCTZ, and vitamins.

In addition to the abbreviation, you should know the definition of the word or have an idea of the condition described by the acronym or abbreviation. You should also know metric abbreviations (L, mg, ml, etc) and abbreviations of common minerals along with valence.

A

ā	before (ante)
āc	before meals
AAA	abdominal aortic aneurysm, acute anxiety attack
AAAAA	aphasia, agnosia, apraxia, agraphia, alexia
ACE	angiotensin-converting enzyme
ACLS	advanced cardiac life support
AD	admitting diagnosis
ADH	antidiuretic hormone
ADL	activities of daily living
ad lib	as desired
AH	abdominal hysterectomy
AHD	arteriosclerotic heart disease
AIDS	acquired immune deficiency syndrome
AK	above the knee
AKA	above the knee amputation
AMA	against medical advice; American Medical Association
AMI	acute myocardial infarction
ANP	advanced nurse practitioner
ARC	AIDS-related complex
ARF	acute renal failure
ARI	acute respiratory infection
ARDS	adult respiratory distress syndrome; acute respiratory distress syndrome.
art	arterial

ATN	acute tubular necrosis
ASA	aspirin
ASCVD	arteriosclerotic cardiovascular disease
ATN	acute tubular necrosis
Aus©	auscultation
A&W	alive and well

B

BG	blood glucose
bid	twice daily
Bil(at)	bilateral
BK	below knee
BKA	below the knee amputation
BLE	both lower extremities
BM	bowel movement; bone marrow
B/O	because of
bol	bolus
BP	blood pressure; bathroom privileges; bedpan
BPH	benign prostatic hypertrophy
bronch	bronchoscopy; bronchoscope
BS	blood sugar
BSA	body surface area
BSN	Bachelor of Science in Nursing

C

CA	cancer, carcinoma
CAB	coronary artery bypass
CABG	coronary artery bypass graft
CAD	coronary artery disease
CAT	computerized axial tomography
cath	catheter, catheterize
CC	chief complaint; complications and co-morbidities
CCRN	Certified Critical Care Registered Nurse
CCU	cardiac care unit, coronary care unit
CEU	continuing education unit
CICU	cardiac (coronary) intensive care unit
CHF	congestive heart failure
CAPD	continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis
CKD	chronic kidney disease
CN	charge nurse
CNM	certified nurse -midwife; clinical nurse manager
CNSN	Certified Nutrition Support Nurse
COPD	chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
CP	chest pain

CPAP	continuous (constant) positive airway pressure
CRF	chronic renal failure
CSF	cerebrospinal fluid
CVA	cerebrovascular accident
CVD	cardiovascular disease
CXR	chest x-ray

D

DAT	diet as tolerated
DC, dc	discontinue
D/C	discharge (unacceptable abbreviation)
DD	differential diagnosis
decub	lying down (decubitus)
DM	diabetes mellitus
DNR	do not resuscitate
DOB	date of birth
DOA	date of admission
DOE	dyspnea on exertion
DON	director of nurses
Decub	decubitus ulcer
DRG	Diagnosis Related Group
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
DT	delirium tremens
DVT	deep vein thrombosis
DW	distilled water; dry weight
Dx	diagnosis

E

EBL	estimated blood loss
EC	enteric coated
ECF	extended care facility
Echo	echocardiogram
E coli	<i>Escherichia coli</i>
ECMO	extracorporeal membrane oxygenation
ECV	extracellular volume
ECW	extracellular water
ED	emergency department
EDC	estimated date of confinement
edent	edentulous
EEG	electroencephalogram
EENT	eye, ear, nose, throat

EEP	end expiratory pressure
EF	ejection fraction
EFA	essential fatty acids
EGA	estimated gestational age
EKG	electrocardiogram
ELISA	enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (immunological testing)
EN	enteral nutrition
EOMB	explanation of medical benefits
EPAP	expiratory positive airway pressure
EPI	epinephrine
EPO	erythropoietin
EPS	extrapyramidal symptoms
ESLD	end-stage liver disease
ESRD	end-stage renal disease
ET	endotracheal tube
ETD	estimated time of death
Etiol	etiology
ETOH	ethyl alcohol
Exp	expired

F

F	female
FBG	fasting blood glucose
FAS	fetal alcohol syndrome
FBS	fasting blood sugar
FOB	foot of bed
FTN	full-term nursery
FTP	failure to progress
FTT	failure to thrive
F/O	follow-up
FUO	fever of undetermined origin
Fx	fracture

G

GALT	gut-associated lymphoid tissue
GB	gallbladder
GBD	gallbladder disease
GBS	gallbladder series
GC	gonococcus
GERD	gastroesophageal reflux disease
GFR	glomerular filtration rate
GI	gastrointestinal
G	gravid
GSW	gunshot wound

GU gastric ulcer, genitourinary

H

HA headache
HCO₃ bicarbonate
HCTZ hydrochlorothiazide
HDN hemolytic disease of the newborn
HD hemodialysis
HEENT head, eyes, ears, nose, and throat
hemi hemiplegia, hemiplegic
HH hiatal hernia
HHNKS hyperglycemic, hyperosmolar nonketotic syndrome
HI head injury
HIV hum immunodeficiency virus
HL hearing loss
HLHS hypoplastic left heart syndrome
H&N head and neck
H&P history and physical
H/O; h/o history of
HOB head of bed
HOH hard of hearing
HR heart rate
hs bedtime
Htn hypertension
Hx history

I

IBD inflammatory bowel disease
IBS irritable bowel syndrome
ICW intracellular water
IGT impaired glucose tolerance
IHD ischemic heart disease
INH isoniazid
I & O intake and output
IUGR intrauterine growth retardation
IVP intravenous pyelography; intravenous push
IVPB Intravenous piggyback
ISVD interventricular septal defect

J

JCAHO Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations

K

K potassium
KCl potassium chloride
KDC infant warming bed
KLS kidney, liver, spleen
KVO keep vein open (IV rate of usually 25 cc/hr with NS or D5W)
KUB kidney, ureter, bladder

L

lap laporotomy
LBW low birth weight
LCSW licensed clinical social worker
LES lower esophogeal spinchter
LFT liver function tests
LGA large for gestational age
LLQ lower left quadrant
LMP last menstrual period
LOC laxative of choice (unacceptable abbreviation); level of consciousness
LOS length of stay
LP lumbar puncture
LR lactated ringers
LRQ lower right quadrant
LTC long term care
LVH left ventricular hypertrophy
lytes electrolytes

M

M Male, married
MAOI monamine oxidase inhibitor
MDD major depressive disorder
mec meconium
med-surg medical-surgical
mEq milliequivalents
mEq/L milliequivalents per liter
met(s) metastasis, metastasize, metastasizing
MI myocardial infarction
MICU medical intensive care unit
mM millimole
M&M morbidity & mortality
mmHg millimeters of mercury (BP unit)

MO	mineral oil; months old
MOM	milk of magnesia
Mono	monocyte; mononucleosis
Mosm	milliosmol
MR	magnetic resonance; medical records; mental retardation
MRSA	methicillin resistant staph aureus
MRI	magnetic resonance imaging
MS	mitral stenosis; multiple sclerosis
MSW	Master of Social Work
MT	medical technologist
MVA	motor vehicle accident
MVP	mitral valve prolapse

N

N/A	not available
NAD	no acute distress
NAS	no added salt
NEC	necrotizing enterocolitis
NG(T)	nasogastric (tube)
NH(P)	nursing home (placement)
NKA	no known allergies
NI	normal
NIDDM	non-insulin dependant diabetes mellitus (not to be used anymore)
NOS	not otherwise specified; no organisms seen
NPO	nil per os (nothing by mouth)
NS	normal saline; neurosurgery
NSAID	nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug
N & V	nausea and vomiting
NVD	nausea, vomiting, diarrhea

O

OB	obstetrics
OBS	organic brain syndrome
OC	oral contraceptive
OOB	out of bed
OR	operating room
Ortho	orthopedics
O2 sat	oxygen saturation
OT	occupational therapy
OTC	over-the-counter

P

p	post; after
P	para; phosphorus; pulse
PA	pernicious anemia; Physician's Assistant
P&A	percussion and auscultation
PACU	postanaesthesia care unit
Para	para (nullipara, primipara, Para I, Para II, etc)
Path	pathology
p.c.	after meals
PCA	patient-controlled analgesia
PVN	penicillin
PCOD	polycystic ovarian disease
PDA	patent ductus arteriosus
PE	pelvic exam; physical exam
PEEP	positive end-expiratory pressure
PEG	percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy
PERRLA	pupils equal, round, reactive to light and accommodation
PFT	pulmonary function test
PH	past history
PT	physical therapy
PTA	prior to admission/arrival
PICC	peripherally inserted central catheter
PIP	positive inspiratory pressure
PKU	phenylketonuria
PMH	past medical history
PN	parenteral nutrition
PO; po	per os (by mouth); phone order
POD#	postoperative day#
Post-op	postoperative
PP	postpartum; post-prandial
PPBS	post-prandial blood sugar
PR; pr	per rectum
Pre-op	pre-operative
PRN	pro re nata (as necessary)
Prog	prognosis; progress
PSA	prostate specific antigen
PTA	prior to admission
PUD	peptic ulcer disease
Pulm	pulmonary
PVC	premature ventricular contraction
P/Y; PY	pack year (cigarettes)

Q

q	every
QD; qd	every day (unacceptable abbreviation)
QH; qh	every hour
QOD; qod	every other day (unacceptable abbreviation)

R

R	rectal; respiration; right
RA	rheumatoid arthritis; right atrium; room air
Resp	respiratory; respiration
RDS	respiratory distress syndrome
Re	concerning
Rh	rhesus factor (will be + or -)
RIA	radioimmunoassay
RLE	right lower extremity
RLL	right lower lobe
RLQ	right lower quadrant
RN	registered nurse
R/O	rule out
ROM	range of motion; rupture of membranes
ROS	review of symptoms
RQ	respiratory quotient
RR	respiratory rate; recovery room
RRR	regular rate and rhythm
RT	respiratory therapist; radiation therapy
RUE	right upper extremity
RUQ	right upper quadrant
Rx	prescription, take, therapy, treatment

S

s	without
SAH	subarachnoid hemorrhage
SB	small bowel; short bowel
SBE	shortness of breath on exertion, subacute bacterial endocarditis
SBO	small bowel obstruction
SC	sickle cell
SCN	special care nursery
SGA	small for gestational age
SIADH	syndrome of inappropriate antidiuretic hormone
SIDS	sudden infant death syndrome

SLE	systemic lupus erythematosus
SNF	skilled nursing facility
SO	significant other
S/O	signed out
SOAP	subjective, objective, assessment, plan
SOB	shortness of breath
Sol	solution
S/P; s/p	status post
SQ	subcutaneous
S&S, S/S	signs and symptoms
ss; SS;SSE	soapsuds (enema)
s s	one-half (not acceptable)
ST	speech therapist
Staph	staphylococcus
STD	sexually transmitted disease; short-term disability
stat	statim (immediately)
Strep	streptococcus
Subq	subcutaneous
supp	suppository
susp	suspension
Sz	seizure

T

T, temp	temperature; time
T max	maximum temperature
tab	tablet
TAC	temporal artery catheter
tachy	tachycardia
TAH	total abdominal hysterectomy
TB	tuberculosis
TBSA	total burn surface area
TBLC	term birth, living child
TBW	total body water
T&C	type and crossmatch
TF	tube feeding
THR	total hip replacement
TIA	transient ischemic attack
tid	three times a day
TO	telephone order
top	topically
tol	tolerate, tolerated, tolerance
TPN	total parenteral nutrition
TURP	transurethral resection of prostate
TWE	tap water enema

Tx treatment

U

U, u unit (unacceptable abbreviation)
UAC umbilical artery catheter
UAO upper airway obstruction
unk unknown
UOP urinary output
up ad lib up (out of bed) as desired (adlibitum)
UR upper respiratory; utilization review
URI upper respiratory infection
Urol urology; urologist
US; U/S ultrasound
USP United States Pharmacopeia
UTI urinary tract infection

V

V ventricular; volume
VH vaginal hysterectomy
V/D vomiting and diarrhea
Vent ventral; ventricular; ventilator
viz that is, namely
VLBW very low birth weight
VO verbal order
VO2 oxygen consumption
vol volume
VP venous pressure
VRSA vancomycin resistant staph aureus
VS vital signs

W

W white; widowed
WB weight bearing
WBN well baby nursery
WC; w/c wheelchair
w/d well developed; warm and dry
WD well developed
WF; wf white female
WFL within functional limits
WM; wm white male

WN;w/n	well nourished
WNL	within normal limits
Wt	weight
W/U;w/u	work-up

X

X	times
X-match	cross match

Y

YO; y/o	year(s) old
YTD	year to date

Z

Symbols

↓	decrease
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↑	increase
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♀	female
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♂	male
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1°	primary
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2°	secondary
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α	lower-case alpha;
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β	lower-case beta; prefix denoting the second of a series
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γ	lower-case gamma; prefix denoting third of a series
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Δ	upper-case delta; amount of change or difference
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μ	lower-case mu, micrometer (micron). Unacceptable symbol.
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DO NOT USE

Medical Acronyms & Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Potential Problem	Preferred Term
U (for unit)	Mistaken as zero, four or cc	Write "unit"
IU (for international unit)	Mistaken as IV (intravenous) or 10 (ten)	Write "international unit"
Q.D., Q.O.D. (Latin abbreviation for once daily and every other day)	Mistaken for each other. The period after the Q can be mistaken for an "I" and the "O" can be mistaken for "I".	Write "daily" and "every other day"
Trailing zero (X.0 mg) <i>[Note: Prohibited only for medication-related notations];</i> Lack of leading zero (.X mg)	Decimal point is missed.	Never write a zero by itself after a decimal point (X mg), and always use a zero before a decimal point (0.X mg)
MS MSO ₄ MgSO ₄	Confused for one another. Can mean morphine sulfate or magnesium sulfate.	Write "morphine sulfate" or "magnesium sulfate"
µg (for microgram)	Mistaken for mg (milligrams) resulting in one thousand-fold dosing overdose.	Write "mcg"
H.S. (for half-strength or Latin abbreviation for bedtime)	Mistaken for either half- strength or hour of sleep (at bedtime). q.H.S. mistaken for every hour. All can result in a dosing error.	Write out "half-strength" or "at bedtime"
T.I.W. (for three times a week)	Mistaken for three times a day or twice weekly resulting in an overdose.	Write "3 times weekly" or "three times weekly"

S.C. or S.Q. (for subcutaneous)	Mistaken as SL for sublingual, or "5 every"	Write "Sub-Q", "subQ", or "subcutaneously"
D/C (for discharge)	Interpreted as discontinue whatever medications follow (typically discharge meds).	Write "discharge"
c.c. (for cubic centimeter)	Mistaken for U (units) when poorly written.	Write "ml" for milliliters
A.S., A.D., A.U. (Latin abbreviation for left, right, or both ears)	Mistaken for OS, OD, and OU, etc.).	Write: "left ear," "right ear" or "both ears"