



Are you speaking my language?

Common biological prefixes and suffixes

Prefixes and suffixes in scientific and medical terms are derived from Greek and Latin. Many prefixes include an 'o' if their partner term begins with a consonant (eg dermatology = dermat + logy), but not if the partner term begins with a vowel (eg dermatitis = dermat + itis). Some common prefixes and suffixes are listed below. More terms can be found at www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/appendixa.html.

Prefix	Meaning	Example
aden(o)-	relating to a gland	adenocarcinoma
adip(o)-	relating to fat or fatty tissue	adipocyte
angi(o)-	relating to (blood) vessels	angiogram
ante-	before	antenatal
arteri(o)-	relating to arteries	arteriosclerosis
arthr(o)-	relating to the joints or limbs	arthritis
carcin(o)-	relating to cancer	carcinoma, carcinogen
cardi(o)-	relating to the heart	cardiology, cardiac
cerebr(o)-	relating to the brain	cerebral cortex
chem(o)-	relating to chemistry or a medicine	chemotherapy
contra-	against	contraindicated
cutane-	relating to the skin	cutaneous
cyto-	relating to cells	cytoplasm
dermat(o)-	relating to the skin	dermatology
dors(o)-	relating to the back	dorsal carpal ligament
dys-	abnormal, defective, difficult	dysphagia, dyslexia
ecto-	outside	ectopic pregnancy
endo-	inside	endospore
enter(o)-	relating to the intestine	gastroenterology, enteritis
exo-, extra-	outside	exoskeleton, extradural haemorrhage
fibr(o)-	like a fibre	fibrosarcoma
gastr(o)-	relating to the stomach	gastroenteritis

Prefix	Meaning	Example
haem(o)-, haemat(o)-	relating to the blood	haematology
hepat-	relating to the liver	hepatitis
hyper-	more than normal	hypertension
hypo-	less than normal	hypotension
infra-	below	infrared
inter-	between, among	interstitial space
intra-	within	intra-dermal
lip(o)-	relating to fat	liposuction
nas(o)-	relating to the nose	nasopharynx
necr(o)-	relating to death	necropsy, necrosis
neur(o)-	relating to the nervous system	neurological
ocul(o)-	relating to the eye	oculomotor
onco-	relating to tumours	oncology
osteo-	relating to bone	osteopathy
paed(o)-	relating to a child	paediatric
peri-	around, surrounding	perinatal
post-	after	postpartum
pneum(o)-	relating to the lungs	pneumonia
radi(o)-	relating to radiation	radiotherapy
ren(o)-	relating to the kidney	renal dialysis
rhin(o)-	relating to the nose	rhinitis
thorac(i)-, thorac(o)-	relating to the upper chest (thorax)	thoracic vertebrae
thromb(o)-	relating to a blood clot	thrombosis
vas(o)-, vascul(o)-	relating to the blood vessels	vasoconstrictor, vasculitis
xen(o)-	foreign	xenotransplant

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Suffix	Meaning	Example
-aemia	of the blood	anaemia, hypercholesterolaemia
-algia	pain	arthralgia, myalgia
-cidal, -cide	killing	bactericidal, pesticide
-cyte	relating to cells	leukocyte
-ectomy	removal	appendectomy, mastectomy
-esis	action process or result	amniocentesis, synthesis
-genic	formative, producing	carcinogenic
-gram	record, image	electrocardiogram
-graph	instrument used to record data	electrocardiograph
-graphy	process of recording data	electrocardiography
-iasis	condition	psoriasis
-itis	inflammation	hepatitis, arthritis
-lepsy, -lepsy	attack, seizure	epilepsy
-meter	measure, count	sphygmomanometer
-metry	process of measuring or counting	optometry
-oid	resemblance to	android
-oma	tumour, mass	carcinoma, haematoma
-osis	condition, disease	osteoporosis
-paenia	deficiency	leukopaenia
-pathy	disease, disorder	neuropathy
-phoresis	carrying, transmission	electrophoresis, aphoresis
-scope	instrument for viewing	microscope
-scopy	process of viewing	microscopy