

## Medical Etymology Anatomy

The following terms are taken from Medical Etymology. The History and Derivations of Medical Terms for Students of Medicine, Dentistry, and Nursing. By: O.H. Perry Pepper, M.D. Professor of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania.

### Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used to describe the origin of the word.

Ar. = Arabic  
AS. = Anglo Saxon  
Ch. = Chinese  
Eng. = English  
Ger. = German  
Gr. = Greek  
Ital. = Italian  
L. = Latin  
ME. = Middle English  
ML. = Medieval Latin  
Mod.L. = Modern Latin  
OE. = Old English  
OF. = Old French  
Sp. = Spanish

**abdomen** The origin of this term is not known. Perhaps it is derived from the Latin *abdere* = to hide; hence it might mean the cavity in which odds and ends are hidden away. Others believe it has come from the Latin root *adeps* = fat.

**abducens** See ABDUCTOR.

**abductor** L. *ab* = away from, and *ducere* = to lead. These muscles are named for their function, and the abducens nerve similarly is named because it turns the eyeball outward.

**accessory** L. *accedere* = to be added to; from *ad* = to, and *cedere* = to come. The accessory nerve is functionally accessory to the vagus.

**accommodation** L. *accommodare* = to make fit; from *ad* = to, and *commodare* = to adjust.

**acetabulum** L. *acetum* = vinegar, and *-bulum*, a suffix signifying the instrument. This cup-shaped part of the hip was thought to resemble a small vinegar cruet of Roman times.

**acetylcholine** L. *acetum* = vinegar, and Gr. *chole* = bile. From *acetum* came acetic and acetyl; from *chole* came choline. It is the acetyl derivative of choline.

**achilles** Gr. The infant *Achilles* was dipped into the river Styx by his mother to render him impervious to wounds. She held him by his heel, which remained vulnerable, and it was in the heel that he was fatally wounded by an arrow at the battle of Troy.

**achondroplasia** Gr. *a* = not, *chondros* = cartilage, *plasis* = a molding, and *-ia* = condition. In other words, a failure of normal development of cartilage.

**acinus** L. *acinus* = grape.

**acoustic** Gr. *akoustikos* = pertaining to hearing. Hence the auditory nerve.

**acromegaly** Gr. *akron* = tip or extremity, and *megas* = large.

**acromion** Gr. *akron* = tip or summit, and *omos* = shoulder. The word *akron* gives the combining forms *acra-* or *acro-*. The famous Acropolis in Athens was built on a summit.

**adductor** L. *ad* = to, and *ducere* = to lead. The muscles so named draw the part toward the medial line.

**adenocarcinoma** Gr. *aden* = gland, and *carcinoma* (see below).

**adenoid** Gr. *aden* = gland, and *eidōs* = resemblance.

**adipose** L. *adiposus*; from *adeps* = fat.

**adrenal** L. *ad* = to, and renal from *ren* = kidney. The adrenal gland lies above the kidney and is sometimes called the suprarenal.

**adventitia** L. *adventitiū* = coming from abroad; from *ad* = to, and *venire* = to come.

**afferent** L. *ad* (*af-*) = to, and *ferre* = to carry. Used for a variety of structures carrying material or impulses to a center or to an organ.

**ala** L. *ala* = a wing. It is believed that *ala* is an eroded form of *axilla*.

**albicans** L. *albicare* = to be white.

**alimentary** L. *alimentum* = nourishment. An adjective applied to the digestive system or alimentary canal.

**allantois** Gr. *allas* = a sausage, and *eidōs* = resemblance.

**alveolus** L. diminutive of *alveus* = any hollowed out structure.

**ameloblast** OF. *en* = on, *amel* = enamel, and Gr. *blastos* = germ.

**ampulla** L. *ampulla* = a jug. Perhaps an onomatopoeic word whose sound suggests the object; in this case, fluid flowing from the jug. Applied in anatomy to a number of structures supposedly resembling a jug.

**amygdala** Gr. *amygdale* = an almond. Applied to the tonsil, because of a similarity in shape.

**anastomosis** Gr. *ana* = up, and *stoma* = mouth; hence an opening up.

**anatomy** Gr. *ana* = up or apart, *tome* = a cutting.

**anencephaly** Gr. *a(an-)* = not, and *enkephalon* = brain. One of the many congenital defects.

**aneurysm** Gr. *aneurysma* = a widening; from *ana* = across, and *eurys* = broad.

**angio-** Gr. *angeion* = a vessel.

**annulus** L. *anus* = ring, and *-ulus*, a diminutive suffix. Applied to many small, ring-shaped structures.

**antero-** L. *anterior* = in front of.

**antrum** Gr. *antron* = a cave. The antra are hollow caves in our skull.

**anus** L. *anus* = a ring. The terminal orifice of the bowel with its "ringed" musculature.

**aorta** Gr., perhaps from *aeirein* = to lift up, or to be hung. Hippocrates used it of a bronchus; Aristotle transferred use of the term to the artery from which the heart hangs. The word was taken over into Latin as *aorte*, and first appeared as *aorta* in English in 1594.

**apical** L. *apex* = tip, top, or pointed end. The genitive of *apex* is *apicis*, and this explains the adjective *apical*.

**aponeurosis** Gr. *apo* = from, and *neuron* = anything of a fibrous nature. Previous to Aristotle the word *neuron* had this meaning, and in Athens a cobbler was a *neurorrhaphos* or one who sews with tendons. This offers a good idea of the state of anatomical knowledge at that period. Aristotle limited use of the term *neuron* to the nerves.

**appendix** L. *appendere* = to hang upon; from *ad* = to, and *pendere* = to hang. Used since the early seventeenth century to mean a small process developed from the surface of an organ.

**aqueduct** L. *aqua* = water, and *ductus* = a canal. In Latin the word was spelled *aquaeductus*, which explains why we spell it with an *e*.

**arachnoid** Gr. *arachne* = spider, and *eidōs* = resemblance. From this root came a Latin term *arachnoides* = spider-like, and from this came the name *arachnoid* for the cobweb-like membrane covering the brain and spinal cord.

**areola** L. *area* = a courtyard or space, and diminutive suffix *-ola*. A term used in several ways, but especially applied to the pigmented area around the nipple.

**artery** Gr. perhaps from *aer* = air, and *terein* = to keep. This derivation suggests the ancient belief that the arteries were windpipes. Adopted into Latin as *arteria* with the same meaning until the time of Harvey.

**articulation** L. *articulus*, diminutive of *artus* = joint, and *-atio*, a suffix originally denoting action.

**arytenoid** Gr. *arytaina* = a pitcher, and *eidōs* = resemblance. The arytenoid cartilages were thought to resemble little pitchers.

**ascites** Gr. *askos* = a bag or bladder. No better name could be given to the fluid-filled abdomen. Sometimes *ascites* is applied to the fluid itself.

**astigmatism** Gr. *a* = not, and *stigma* = a point. Hence a failure of the light rays to focus.

**astrocyte** Gr. *astron* = a star, and *kytos* = a vessel or cell. These cells are shaped like stars.

**ataxia** Gr. *a* = not, *taxis* = order, and *-ia* = condition. Applied to a lack of muscular coordination.

**atelectasis** Gr. *ateles* = imperfect, and *ektasis* = expansion.

**atheroma** Gr. *athere* = porridge; an unexpected derivation, but a good descriptive term. The combining form *athero-*, from the same stem, appears in the compound term atherosclerosis (*skleros* = hard).

**atlas** Gr. *Atlas* was the mythological Titan who supported the world on his shoulders. Vesalius, in the sixteenth century, gave this name to the first cervical vertebra, which supports the head.

**atresia** Gr. *a* = not, *tresis* = a boring, and *-ia* = a condition. Hence an abnormal closure of an opening.

**atrium** L. *atrium* = a hall, or an entrance, and therefore used for the upper chamber of the heart.

**atrophy** Gr. *a* = without, and *trophe* = nourishment.

**atropine** Gr. *Atropos* = one of the Fates, after whom the botanical genus *Atropa* is named, perhaps because the drug extracted from *Atropa belladonna* can quickly decide your fate.

**auditory** L. *audire* = to hear.

**auricle** L. *auricula*, diminutive of *auris* = ear. Used in anatomy of any ear-shaped structure, but applied especially to the appendage of the upper chamber of each side of the heart, because they bear a rough resemblance to ears.

**autonomic** Gr. *autos* = self, and *nomos* = law. Hence that part of the nervous system which is self-controlled or autonomous.

**autopsy** Gr. *autos* = self, and *opsis* = to look at. In the third century B.C., the word *autopsia* denoted those observations on the patient made by the physician himself, in contrast to *historia*, supplied by the patient.

**axial** L. *axis* = axle or pivot

**axilla** L. *axilla* = the armpit.

**axis** L. *axis* = axle or pivot. Used as a name of the second cervical vertebra.

**azygos** Gr. *a* = not, and *zygos* = a yoke. Therefore, this applies to any unpaired or unyoked structure, such as the azygos vein or the azygos lobe of the lung.

**basilar** Mod. L. *basilaris* = basal; originally from Gr. *basis* = a base.

**bicuspid** L. *bi* = two, and *cuspis* = point. The term premolar is also used for these teeth.

**bile** L. *bilis* = bile. Many medical terms come from this root, *bilis*, including bilirubin (*ruber* = red) and biliverdin (*viridis* = green).

**biopsy** Gr. *bios* = life, and *opsis* = vision. Hence biopsy signifies an examination of tissue removed from the living body.

**blastula** Gr. *blastos* = germ or bud, and *derma* = skin.

**brachial** L. *brachium* = an arm.

**bradycardia** Gr. *bradys* = slow and *kardia* = heart.

**bregma** Gr. *bregma* = front of the head.

**brevis** L. *brevis* = short.

**bronchial** Adjective from BRONCHUS.

**bronchus** Gr. *bronchos* = windpipe; originally from Gr. *brechein* = to moisten. Plato believed that swallowed liquids went down the trachea into the bronchi.

**bruit** Fr. *bruit* = sound or noise.

**buccal** L. *bucca* = the cheek.

**buccinator** L. *buccinator* = a trumpeter. Hence the muscles of the cheek.

**bullae** L. *bulla* = a bubble. The adjective is bullous; both are used of a lesion which resembles a bubble.

**bursa** ML. *bursa* = a purse, hence any closed sac.

**cadaver** L. *cadere* = to fall dead.

**calcaneus** L. *calcaneus* = relating to the heel.

**calyx** Gr. *kalyx* = husk or cup. A term applied especially to the recesses in the pelvis of the kidney.

**canthus** Gr. *kanthos* = corner of the eye.

**capillary** L. *capillaris* = relating to the hair; hence any structure as fine as a hair.

**caput** L. *caput* = head.

**caput medusae** L. *caput* = head, and genitive of *Medusa* = one of the mythological Gorgons with hair of live snakes. The term is applied to the dilated veins which appear on the abdomen, due to obstruction of the portal circulation.

**carcinoma** Gr. *karkinos* = a crab, and *-oma* = tumor or neoplasm. Celsus used the word carcinoma for all malignant growths, but added the adjective *kakoethes* = malignant to designate some which required surgery.

**cardia** Gr. *kardia* = heart. Used to denote the end of the stomach lying nearest the heart.

**carina** L. *carina* = keel of a boat, hence used of several anatomical structures having a central ridge.

**carotid** Gr. *karoun* = to put to sleep. In early Greece, jokesters used to cause goats to fall down motionless by pressure on these arteries and to return to normal by release of pressure. This is because horses and goats depend entirely on the carotids for their cerebral blood supply, since the vertebral arteries are insufficient. (An ancient day "sleeper hold".)

**cartilage** L. *cartilago* = gristle.

**cauda** L. *cauda* = a tail. Such as the cauda equina or "horse's tail" of the spinal cord.

**cava** L. *cavus* = hollow, as in the word cave.

**cecum** L. *caecus* = blind.

**celiac** Gr. *koilia* = the belly.

**cell** L. *cella* = a small chamber.

**cephalic** Gr. *kephale* = head.

**cerebellum** L. diminutive of *cerebrum* = brain.

**cerebrum** L. *cerebrum* = brain.

**cervical** Look at cervix.

**cervix** L. *cervix* = neck. Most often used of the neck of the uterus.

**chiasm** Gr. *chiasma* = two crossing lines. Derived from the Greek letter *chi* which in Greek script was written c.

**choana** Gr. *choane* = a funnel. Applied to the posterior naris.

**cholangitis** Gr. *chole* = bile, *angeion* = vessel, and *-itis* = inflammation.

**chondral** Gr. *chondros* = cartilage.

**chorda** L. *chorda* = a string or cord. In Greek, the corresponding word *chorde* signifies the intestine.

**choroid** Gr. *chorion* = skin, and *eidosis* = resemblance.

**chyle** Gr. *chylos* = juice.

**chyme** Gr. *chymos* = juice. Used by Plato, and taken into medical terminology a long time ago. It is now seldom employed alone, but the roots persists in such terms as parenchyma and mesenchyme.

**ciliary** L. *ciliaris* = pertaining to eyelashes; from *cilia* = eyelashes. Used of any hair-like structure.

**circulation** L. *circularis* = to make a circle. The movement of the blood was known to follow a circular course.

**cirrhosis** Gr. *kirrhos* = tawny yellow. Laennec coined this term for the yellowish liver of fat and fibrosis. It now has a wider application, tending to connote fibrosis irrespective of color.

**cisterna** L. *cisterna* = a reservoir or cistern.

**clavicle** L. *clavicula*, diminutive of *clavis* = a key. So named for its resemblance in shape.

**coccyx** Gr. *kokkyx* = cuckoo. Adopted for anatomy from a supposed resemblance of this bone to the beak of a cuckoo.

**coelom** Gr. *koiloma* = a hollow. Used in embryology, and as a name for the general body cavity in the adult.

**collagen** Gr. *kolla* = glue, and *gennào* = to produce.

**commissure** L. *commissura*; from *con* (*com-*) = together, and *mittere* = to put. Hence a joining or a seam.

**condyle** Gr. *kondylos* = a knuckle.

**conjunctiva** L. *con* = with, and *jungere* (*junctus*) = to join.

**constrictor** L. *con* = together, and *stringere* = to pull.

**conus** Gr. *konos* = a cone or peg. Used of various more or less peg-shaped anatomical structures: for example, the conus medullaris of the spinal cord..

**cornea** L. *corneus* = horny. The cornea of the eye was formally called the *cornea tela*, which meant the horny tissue or layer.

**cornu** L. *cornu* = a horn. Applied especially to horn-shaped structures in the CNS.

**coronary** L. *coronarius* = pertaining to or like a crown. Applied especially to the arteries of the heart, so called because they encircle the organ as a wreath or crown.

**corpus** L. *corpus* = body.

**corpus luteum** L. *luteus* = yellow. Describing the scarring of the ovary.

**cortex** L. *cortex* = outer layer or bark. In anatomy, it is applied to the outer layer of organs.

**cranium** Gr. *kranion* = skull.

**cremaster** Gr. *kremastos* = hanging. Galen used this appropriate name for the muscle on which the testicle is hung.

**cribriform** L. *cribrum* = a sieve, and *forma* = form. Applied to the sieve-like plate of the ethmoid bone.

**cricoid** Gr. *krikos* = a circle or ring, and *eidōs* = resemblance.

**crus** L. *crista* = leg. Any structure in anatomy resembling a leg or, in the plural *crura*, of a pair of dividing structures.

**cuboid** Gr. *kybos* = a cube, and *eidōs* = resemblance. A square bone in the foot.

**cuneiform** L. *cuneus* = a wedge, and *forma* = form. In anatomy for wedge-shaped bones in the wrist and ankle.

**cutaneous** L. *cutaneus* = relating to the skin; from *cutis* = skin.

**cyst** Gr. *kystis* = bladder.

**cyto-** Gr. *kytos* = vessel or urn; the same as the Latin *vas*.

**dactyl** Gr. *daktylos* = finger or toe.

**decidua** L. *decidus* = falling off. The decidua is the altered mucous membrane lining the uterus during pregnancy and puerperium.

**deferens** L. *de* = away, and *ferre* = to carry.

**deltoid** Gr. *delta* = the Greek letter D, and *eidōs* = resemblance. Applied to the deltoid muscle because of its triangular shape.

**depressor** L. *de* = down, *premere* = to press, and the suffix *-or* = the agent.

**diaphragm** Gr. *diaphragma* = a wall or partition; from *dia* = across, and *phragma* = a wall.

**diastole** Gr. *dia* = apart, and *stellein* = to send. Hence to dilate or spread.

**diencephalon** Gr. *dia* (di-) = through, and *encephalon* = brain. Hence the "between" brain.

**digastric** Gr. *di* = two, and *gaster* = belly. A term descriptive of this muscle, which has two different bellies.

**distal** L. *distare* = to stand apart or to be distant.

**dorsal** L. *dorsum* = the back.

**duodenum** L. *duodeni* = twelve. Thus named because of its length in fingerbreadths.

**dura** L. *durus* = hard.

**endocrine** Gr. *endon* = within, and *krinein* = to separate. Denotes a gland whose product passes into the blood, being separated within the gland.

**ependyma** Gr. *epi* = upon, and *endyma* = a garment. In anatomy, applied to the lining of the spinal canal or outer covering of the spinal cord.

**epicardium** Gr. *epi* = upon, and *kardia* = heart.

**epigastrium** Gr. *epi* = upon, and *gaster* = stomach.

**epiphysis** Gr. *epi* = upon, and *physis* = growth.

**epiploic** Gr. *epiploon* = omentum. The epiploic appendages hang from the omentum.

**epispadas** Gr. *epi* = upon, and *spadon* = a rent or tear. Applies to a congenital opening of the urethra on the upper surface or dorsum of the penis.

**erector** L. *erectus* = upright. Applied to a muscle which causes a structure to stand upright.

**esophagus** Gr. *oisophagos* = gullet. The Greek term was formed from *oiso*, the future tense of *phero* = to carry, and *phagein* = food.

**ethmoid** Gr. *ethmos* = a sieve, and *eidos* = resemblance. A term describing the structure of the ethmoid bone of the skull.

**eversion** L. *evertere* = to turn outward; from *ex* (*e-*) = out, and *vertere* = to turn.

**extensor** L. *extendere* = to stretch out.

**extrinsic** L. *extrinsecus* = originating or acting outside; from *exter* = outside, and *-secus* = on the side.

**falciform** L. *falx* = sickle, and *forma* = form. The falciform ligament has this shape.

**fascia** L. *fascia* = a ribbon or fillet.

**femur** L. *femur* = thigh, but applied to the bone of the upper leg. The adjective femoral is used of various structures in the thigh.

**fibula** L. *fibula* = a clasp or a pin; originally from *figo* = fasten.

**fimbria** L. *fimbria* = fringe. Applied to the processes at the abdominal end of the fallopian tube.

**flexor** L. *flectere* = to bend. From the same root comes the word flex, flexion, and flexure = a fold or crease

**follicle** L. *folliculus*, diminutive of *follis* = a bag.

**foramen** L. *foramen* = an opening; from *forare* = to bore.

**fornix** L. *fornix* = arch or vault.

**fossa** L. *fossa* = a ditch. Used in anatomy for depressed areas.

**fovea** L. *fovea* = a pit. In ophthalmology it applies to the central depression in the retina.

**frontal** L. *frons* = forehead.

**fundus** L. *fundus* = bottom.

**ganglion** Gr. *ganglion* = a swelling.

**gastric** Gr. *gaster* = stomach or belly.

**genitalia** L. *genitalis* = pertaining to reproduction.

**genu** L. *genu* = the knee, but used in anatomy of any bent structure.

**glabella** L. *glabellus* = smooth. Name for the prominence on the frontal bone just above the nose.

**glans** L. *glans* = acorn. Used for the head of the penis, which is shaped somewhat like an acorn.

**glenoid** Gr. *glene* = joint socket, and *eidos* = resemblance. Homer used the word *genoid* to signify the pupil of the eye; and because of the small images seen reflected there, it also meant doll or little girl.

**gluteal** Gr. *gloutos* = buttocks.

**gonad** Gr. *gone* = a seed or generation.

**gubernaculum** L. *gubernaculum* = helm or little governor; from *gubernare* = to control, and the diminutive suffix *-culum*. The gubernaculum of the testis is the fetal cord which guides the descent of the testis.

**gut** AS. *guttas* = the bowels.

**gyrus** Gr. *gyros* = a circle.

**hallux** L. *hallux* = great toe.

**hamulus** L. *hamulus*, a diminutive of *hamus* = a hook. Applied to hook-shaped structures.

**helicotrema** Gr. *helix* = a coil, and *trema* = a hole. Applied to the communication between the two channels of the cochlear convolutions.

**helix** Gr. *helix* = a coil or screw. The coiled or turned-over margin of the auricle.

**hernia** L. *hernia* = a rupture.

**hilum (hilus)** L. *hilum* = a small thing.

**humerus** L. (*humerus*) = the shoulder bone; related to Gr. *omos* = the shoulder

**hydrocele** Gr. *hydor* = water, and *kele* = swelling. Usually used of a collection of fluid in the tunica vaginalis of the testes.

**hyper** Gr. *hyper* = excessive.

**hypo** Gr. *hypo* = less.

**ilium** L. *ilium* = the flank, and the iliac bone. Originally because the small intestines are largely supported by this bone, and the old term for the small intestines was *ilia* (plural of *ilium*).

**incisor** L. *incidere* = to cut into; from *in* = in, and *caedere* = to cut. Applied to the eight cutting teeth.

**incus** L. *incus* (*incudis*) = anvil.

**inguinal** L. *inguen* = groin.

**innominate** L. *innominatus* = unnamed; from *in* = not, and *nomen* = name. There are two structures called innominate, one artery and one bone.

**insertion** L. *in* = in, and *serere* = to put. Hence, the point of attachment of a muscle in the more movable of the two structures which it joins.

**inter** L. *inter* = between

**intestine** L. *intestinum* = intestine. The noun *intestinum* came from the adjective *intestinus*, which meant nothing more than inner or inward. The popular term "innards" expresses the same thing.

**inversion** L. *invertere* = to turn about or inside out.

**in vitro** See vitreous.

**in vivo** See vitreous

**ipsilateral** L. *ipse* = self or same, and *latus* = side.

**iris** Gr. *iris* = rainbow.

**ischium** Gr. *ischion* = hip.

**jejunum** L. *jejunos* = fasting or empty. Galen named the second part of the small intestine *nestis* = fasting, because he believed it was always found empty after death.

**joint** L. *jungere* = to join.

**jugular** L. *jugulum* = throat. Hence these veins of the throat.

**kyphosis** Gr. *kyphos* = bent, and *-osis* = condition, hence humpback.

**labia** L. *labium* = lip.

**labyrinth** Gr. *labyrinthos* = a maze.

**lacrimal** L. *lacrimal* = a tear.

**lateral** L. *latus* = side.

**lemniscus** Gr. *lemniskos* = a band.

**lenticular** L. *lens* = a lentil, and a diminutive suffix. This adjective means shaped like a lentil.

**levator** L. *levator* = anything that raises; from *levare* = to lift.

**ligament** L. *ligamentum* = ligament; from *ligare* = to bind.

**linea** L. *lien* = spleen. Related to the Greek term *splen* = spleen.

**lingula** L. *lingula*, diminutive of *lingua* = tongue.

**lip** AS. *lippa* = lip

**longissimus** L. superlative of *longus* = long. Applied to the long muscles of the back.

**longus** L. *longus* = long

**lordosis** Gr. *lordos* = bent backward. Applied to the spine.

**lumbar** L. *lumbus* = the loin.

**malleolus** L. diminutive of *malleus* = hammer.

**mandible** L. *mandibula* = jaw; from *mandere* = to chew, and the suffix *-bulum*, indicating the instrument.

**masseter** Gr. *maseter* = chewer. One of the few muscles named in the writings of Galen.

**mastication** L. *masticare* = to chew.

**mastoid** Gr. *mastos* = breast or nipple, and *eidōs* = resemblance.

**maxilla** L. *maxilla* = jaw bone.

**meatus** L. *meatus* = a channel or way.

**mediastinum** ML. *mediastinum* = medial, intermediate.

**medulla** L. *medulla* = marrow. Used for the non-cortical part of some organs, such as the kidney and adrenal.

**meninges** Gr. *meninx* = membrane; plural, *meninges*.

**mesentery** Gr. *mesos* = middle, and *enteron* = intestine.

**mesoderm** Gr. *mesos* = middle, and *derma* = the skin.

**metacarpus** Gr. *meta* = after or beyond, and *karpos* = wrist.

**metatarsus** Gr. *meta* = after or beyond, and *tarsos* = instep.

**molar** L. *mola* = a millstone. Hence, a grinding tooth.

**muscle** L. *musculus*, diminutive of *mus* = a mouse. Thus a muscle was a little mouse running about under the skin.

**mylohyoid** Gr. *myle* = a mill, and *hyoid*. The word *myle* was given to the posterior teeth, the grinders, and became *mola* in Latin. Hence the designation molar for these teeth. Mylohyoid, therefore, refers to the posterior part of the jaw and the hyoid bone.

**nares** L. *naris* = nostril.

**navicular** L. *navis* = boat, and the diminutive suffix *-cula*. Hence, this bone suggests the shape of a little boat.

**node** L. *nodus* = a knot. Used, for example, in lymph node.

**nucha** ML. *nucha* = the back of the neck. This word, originally Arabic, was adopted into Latin and changed in French to *nuque*.

**oculomotor** L. *oculus* = eye, and *motor* = producing movement. applied to the nerve supplying several muscles which move the eye.

**olecranon** Gr. *olenokranon*, from *olene* = elbow, and *kranos* = helmet. In other words, the protector of the elbow.

**olfactory** L. *olfacere* = to smell.

**omphalocele** Gr. *omphalos* = umbilicus, and *kele* = swelling, used here in the sense of hernia. Hence an umbilical hernia.

**ophthalmia** Gr, *ophthalmos* = eye, and *-ia* = disease. This suffix used to be more common but is being superseded by *-itis*.

**opponens** L. *ob* (*op-*) = against, and *ponere* = to place. In other words, an opposing muscle.

**oral** L. *os* = mouth; genitive, *oris*.

**orbicular** L. *orbicularis* = circular or disc-shaped; from *orbis* = circle or orb. The orbicularis muscle closes the eye.

**orbit** L. *orbis* = a ring or circle.

**orchid** Gr. *orchis* = testicle. Hence the word orchitis, for inflammation of the gonads.

**orifice** L. *orificium* = an opening.

**origin** L. *origo* = starting point.

**ostium** L. *ostium* = door or opening.

**-otomy** Gr. *tome* = a cutting.

**palate** L. *palatum* = palate.

**palmar** L. *palma* = the palm of the hand.

**pampiniform** L. *pampinus* = tendrils, and *forma* = form. The pampiniform plexus of veins in the spermatic cord suggests a number of interwoven tendrils.

**panniculus** L. diminutive of *pannus* = cloth or covering. Hence a little covering.

**papilla** L. *papilla* = nipple.

**parasympathetic** Gr. *para* = beside, and SYMPATHETIC. A term coined as a name for the autonomic nervous system.

**parenchyma** Gr. *para* = beside, and *enchyma* = infusion or juice. Attributed to Erasistratus, about 300 B.C. who coined it to signify "what is poured in".

**parietal** L. *paries* = a wall.

**parotid** Gr. *para* = beside, and *ous (ot)* = ear. The parotid gland lies just in front of the ear.

**patella** L. *patella* = little plate.

**pectinate** L. *pecten* = a comb. Adjective form of *pecten*, applied to anatomical structures with projections like the teeth of a comb.

**pedicle** L. *pes (pedis)* = foot, and the diminutive suffix *-culus*. Hence a little foot; but the word also meant a stalk of fruit. From this latter comes the anatomical use, for the pedicle of an organ suggests the stalk of an apple or other fruit.

**pelvis** L. *pelvis* = basin. The pelvis is a basin-like structure.

**penis** L. *penis* = the male sexual organ. Originally, the word meant a tail.

**peri-** Gr. *peri* = around.

**perineum** Gr. *perinaion* = the perineum; probably from *peri* = around, and *naiein* = to dwell. The Greek *perina* = scrotum was probably from the same root.

**peroneal** Gr. *perone* = a brooch or pin. Adjective form of *peroneus*, describing the shape of the peroneus muscles.

**pes** L. *pes* = foot. The plural is *pedes*.

**petrosal** L. *petrosus* = stony. Adjective form of *petrous*. The petrous portion of the temporal bone is harder than the rest.

**phalanx** Gr. *phalanx* (plural *phalanges*) = soldiers in close order. A good term for the bones of the toes and fingers.

**phallus** Gr. *phallos* = penis.

**pharynx** Gr. *pharynx* = throat. The adjective pharyngeal and the name of the pharyngeus muscle come from the same source.

**phrenic** Gr. *phren* = (1) diaphragm, and (2) brain. From this word, which dates back to the time when the heart was thought to be the seat of emotions, two series of terms have been derived. From its first meaning, heart or diaphragm, we get the name of the phrenic nerve. On the other hand, from its second meaning for brain, we get phrenology and several compound terms ending in *phrenia*, such as *schizophrenia*, now transformed into *frenzy*. The heart continues to be thought of as the seat of the emotions only in amorous affairs, in which the mind plays a little part.

**pia** L. *pius* = kindly or tender. *Pia* is the feminine of *pius*, which is used in this gender to agree with *mater* = mother. Here *pia mater* means the tender protector of the brain and spinal cord.

**pineal** L. *pinea* = a pine cone. Presumably so named from the shape of this body.

**pinna** L. *pinna* = a wing. Applied to the external ear.

**piriform** L. *pirum* = a pear, and *forma* = form.

**pisiform** L. *pisum* = a pea, and *forma* = form.

**pituitary** L. *pituita* = mucous secretion. In the time of Galen the mucus from the nose and mouth was thought to come from the brain, hence this structure was so named. It has been suggested that the word *spit* comes from the same origin. It was a long time before it was demonstrated that nasal mucus came from glands in the nose, and not through the cribriform plate of the ethmoid bone.

**plantar** L. *planta* = sole of the foot. We used this adjective form but not the noun. Curiously enough, this word *planta* also meant a sprout, twig, or, as might be expected, a plant.

**platysma** Gr. *platysma* = a plate.

**pleura** Gr. *pleura* = the side of the body or the ribs. But the word has come to mean the sac surrounding the lung.

**pneumo** Gr. *pneumon* = lung.

**pons** L. *pons* = a bridge.

**portal** L. *porta* = gate. The portal vein is the vein which enters the gate of the liver.

**postero-** L. *posterus* = behind

**prepuce** L. *prae* (*pre-*) = before, and an obsolete term, perhaps *putum*, for penis. Hence prepus is the male foreskin.

**pronate** L. *pronare* = to turn palm or face downward. Compare supinator.

**prostate** Gr. *pro* = before, the root *sta* = stand, and the suffix *-tes*. In ancient Greece the word *prostater* meant a guard or protector - one who stood before. The prostate gland does stand in front of the bladder.

**proximal** L. *proximus* = next to.

**psoas** Gr. *psosa* = a muscle in the loins.

**pubis** L. *pubis* = the pubic bone.

**pupil** L. *pupilla*, diminutive of *pupa* = a doll or little girl. This word *pupa* is used today of an early stage in the life of an insect, and also from it come our words pup, puppet, and pupil in the sense of a young student. The use of this root in naming the pupil of the eye is said to have arisen from the small reflection of objects seen over the opening of the iris.

**pylorus** Gr. *pyloros* = gatekeeper; from *pyle* = gate, and *ouros* = a guard. The muscular ring of the pylorus guards the outlet of the stomach.

**pyriform** L. *pirum* = a pear, and *forma* = shape or form. Hence describing any pear-shaped structure.

**quadratus** L. *quadratus* = a square in shape. Applied to the several square muscles.

**radius** L. *radius* = spoke of a wheel. Found in the writings of Galen applied to the bone now so named.

**rectum** L. *rectus* = straight. Galen so named the terminal bowel because he found it straight in other animals.

**rectus** L. *rectus* = straight.

**renal** L. *ren* = kidney. It is the adjective form of *ren*.

**retina** L. *rete* = a net. This is probably the correct derivation, although there is no truly net-like structure in the retina. It probably came about as follows: Galen applied to this structure the Greek word *amphiblestron*, which had two meanings - a surrounding coat and a fisherman's net. He used the word in the first sense; but when it was translated into Latin, the translator chose the second meaning.

**retroversion** L. *retro* = backward, and *versio* = turning. Therefore a turning backward.

**rhomboid** Gr. *rhombus* = a lozenge, and *eidōs* = resemblance. Rhomboid denotes a parallelogram with oblique angles and unequal sides. The rhomboid muscle is so named because of its shape.

**risorius** L. *risor* = one who laughs. The risorius muscle draws the angle of the mouth outward.

**sacrum** L. *sacer* = sacred. Sacrum is the neuter form of *sacer*, and was applied to this pelvic keystone because this bone was thought to survive after death and form a part of the body after resurrection.

**sagittal** L. *sagitta* = arrow. Use to mean (1) shaped like an arrow, (2) straight, and (3) running in an antero-posterior direction.

**salpinx** Gr. *salpinx* = a trumpet. This is one of the words which the Greeks adopted from Crete. Applied to structures shaped like a trumpet or tuba. The combining form, salpingo-, appears chiefly in gynecological terms.

**saphenous** Gr. *saphenes* = clear or manifest. Also possibly from Arabic, *al-safin* = hidden, because the vein is available for blood draws in only a small part of its course.

**sartorius** L. *sartor* = a tailor. This muscle was so named because it is employed in squatting in the usual position of an old fashion tailor, with the legs crossed.

**scalenus** Gr. *skalenos* = uneven.

**scaphoid** Gr. *skaphe* = a skiff or anything similarly hollowed out, and *eidōs* = resemblance. The scaphoid bone is of this shape.

**scapula** L. *scapula* = shoulder blade. In ancient times it was used in the plural to mean "the back".

**sciatic** L. *sciaticus*; originally from the Gr. *ischion* = the hip. Hence the term applies to anything near, or pertaining to, the hip.

**sclera** Gr. *skleros* = hard. It is because of its relative toughness that the outer layer of the eye is named the sclera.

**sella turcica** L. *sella* = saddle, and *turcica* = Turkish. A descriptive name for the saddle-shaped prominence of the sphenoid bone. The pituitary gland sits in this saddle.

**serosa** Mod. L. *serus* = membrane giving off serum.

**serratus** L. *serratus* = notched, from *serra* = a saw. The serratus muscle has a jagged edge.

**sesamoid** Gr. *sesame* = an herb, and *eidōs* = resemblance. Galen suggested this name for these little bones because they resembled the seeds of sesame.

**shoulder** AS. *sculdor* = shoulder.

**sigmoid** Gr. *sigma* = the Greek letter S, and *eidōs* = resemblance. In earlier times the letter sigma was written as a single curve (now the letter C), which better explains this name for a curved part of the large bowel.

**sinus** L. *sinus* = a bay or anything hollowed out.

**skeleton** Gr. *skeletos* = dried up.

**skin** AS. *scinn* = skin.

**skull** AS. *skulle* = a bowl.

**socket** OE. *socket* = spearhead; from OF. *soc* = ploughshare. Later the meaning was transferred to mean a sheath or holder, the hollow into which something fits.

**soleus** L. *solea* = sandal, sole of a shoe, and a flat fish. The soleus muscle is not in the sole, but is flat. For the sole of the foot, see PLANTAR.

**soma** Gr. *soma* = the body.

**sphenoid** Gr. *sphen* = wedge, and *eidos* = resemblance. The sphenoid bone is wedge-shaped.

**sphincter** Gr. *sphinkter* = a band; from *sphingein* = to bind.

**spine** L. *spina* = a thorn. Hence any sharp process of bone; later applied to the vertebral column and to the spinal cord

**splanchnic** Gr. *splanchna* = viscera or internal organs. This adjective is applied, for example, to the nerve supplying the viscera.

**spleen** Gr. *splen* = spleen, perhaps originally related to *splanchna* = viscera. In Latin this root became *lien* after losing its initial *sp*. From *splen*, of course, comes splenic and the combining form spleno-.

**squamous** Gr. *squama* = fish-scale.

**stapes** L. *stapes* = stirrup. The smallest of the three ossicles resembles a stirrup.

**stenosis** Gr. *stenos* = narrow, *-osis* = condition. Applied to any narrowing of tubular structure, such as an artery, heart valve, or the esophagus.

**sternum** Gr. *sternon* = the male chest, until Galen limited its meaning to the breast bone.

**stomach** Gr. *stomachos*; originally derived from *stoma* = mouth, and for a time applied to the esophagus, with the thought that the gullet is the mouth of the stomach.

**styloid** Gr. *stylos* = pillar, and *eidos* = resemblance. Applied to the styloid process of the temporal bone.

**sulcus** L. *sulcus* = groove or furrow.

**supinator** L. *supinare* = to turn palm upward or on the back.

**supra** L. *supra* = above.

**sustenaculum** L. *sustenare* = to support (from *sub* = under and *tenere* = to hold), and *-culum* = a diminutive suffix. Applied to a projection from the os calcis which supports the talus.

**suture** L. *sutura* = a sewing or seam. Hence a suture in the anatomical sense, as between the bones of the skull

**sympathetic** Gr. *syn* = with, and *pathos* = suffering.

**symphysis** Gr. *symphysis* = a growing together; from *syn* = with, and *physis* = growth. Hence a union, but not a true joint.

**synapse** Gr. *syn* = together, and *haptein* = to touch.

**syndactylism** Gr. *syn* = together, *daktylos* = finger. A congenital anomaly in which the fingers are webbed together.

**systole** Gr. *syn* = together, *stellein* = to draw. Hence to draw together or to contract, as the heart does in systolic contraction.

**tachycardia** Gr. *tachys* = swift or fast, and *kardia* = heart.

**taenia** Gr. *tainia*, and later L. *taenia* = a ribbon, tape, or fillet. This term, used as the name of a genus of tapeworms, is also applied to the longitudinal muscle of the colon.

**talipes** L. *talipes* = club foot; from *talsus* = ankle, and *pes* = foot.

**talus** L. *talus* = ankle.

**temporal** L. *temporalis* = pertaining to the temples.

**tendon** L. *tendo* = a tendon; from *tendere* = to stretch.

**tensor** L. *tensor* = stretcher or puller.

**thenar** Gr. *thenar* = palm of the hand. Later limited to the radial of the thumb side of the palm.

**thorax** Gr. *thorax* = chest.

**thymus** Gr. *thymos* = a warty growth.

**thyroid** Gr. *thyreos* = a shield, and *eidosis* = resemblance. From a figure-of-eight shield used by the Greeks.

**tibia** L. *tibia* = a flute; from a resemblance in shape.

**tongue** AS. *tunge* = tongue.

**tonsil** L. *tonsilla* = tonsil.

**tooth** AS. *toth* = tooth.

**trachea** Gr. *tracheia* = rough. *Tracheia* bears the feminine ending to agree with *arteria*. The Greeks believed that arteries contained air; Aristotle called the arteries smooth, while he named the windpipe "rough artery".

**tragus** Gr. *tragos* = a male goat. This part of the external ear received this name because of the hairs which grow there, like a billy goat.

**transverse** L. *transversus* = crosswise. used, for example, of a myelitis extending across the cord.

**trapezius** Gr. *trapeza* = a table. Originally a contraction of *tetrapeza* = four-legged.

**triceps** L. *tri* = three, and *caput* = head.

**tricuspid** L. *tri* = three, and *cuspis* = point. Hence applied to the heart valve that has three leaflets.

**trigone** Gr. *trigolon*, from *tri* = three, and *gonia* = angle. Used of several triangular areas, but especially the triangle in the urinary bladder.

**trochanter** Gr. *trochanter* = a runner; derived from *trochos* = a wheel. The name of the processes below the neck of the femur.

**trochlea** L. *trochlea* = pulley.

**truncate** L. *truncus* = stem or trunk. A cut across like a tree stump.

**tubercle** L. *tuber* = a knot or collection, and *-culum* = a diminutive suffix.

**tuberosity** L. *tuber* = knob or localized collection, and *-osity* = condition.

**tunica** L. *tunica* = shirt or covering.

**tympanum** Gr. *tympanon* = a drum. Applied to the eardrum.

**ulna** L. *ulna* = elbow, forearm.

**uncus** L. *uncus* = a hook. Applied to several hook-shaped structures in the brain.

**ureter** Gr. *outeter*, from *ouron* = urine, and the suffix *-ter*, denoting the instrument. Applied to the upper urinary canal.

**uterus** L. *uterus* = womb. Its relationship to *uter* = bag of goat skin, has been suggested.

**uvula** L. *uva* = a grape, and the diminutive suffix *-ula*. Hence a little grape.

**vagina** L *vagina* = a sheath. From its shape and function.

**vagus** L. *vagus* = wandering. Hence of widespread distribution. Our English words vague and vagrant come from this same source.

**varus** L. *valgus* = bowlegged. The word is used in the term *coxa valga* to denote an abduction of the thigh due to deformity of the neck of the femur. In contrast, *genu valgum* has been used to mean knock-kneed.

**vermiform** L *vermis* = worm, and *forma* = form. Its use is not limited to the vermiform appendix.

**vertebra** L. *vertebra* = a joint of the spine; from *vertere* = to turn.

**viscera** L. *viscera*, plural of *viscus* = an internal organ. More often used in the plural form.

**vitreous** L. *vitreus* = glassy. Applied to the vitreous humor of the eye. The word comes originally from *vitrum* = glass; and from this comes the phrase *in vitro*, meaning in a glass receptacle, as contrasted with *in vivo*, in the living body.

**volar** L. *vola* = palm or sole.

**vomer** L. *vomer* = ploughshare. The bone named vomer suggests a ploughshare by shape.

**xiphoid** Gr. *xiphos* = sword, and *eidōs* = resemblance. The name of the tip of the sternum.

**zonula** L. *zona* = a girdle, belt, or zone, and the diminutive suffix *-ula*.

**zygoma** Gr. *zygoma* = bolt or bar, related to *zygon* = a yoke. Applied to the cheekbone because of its shape.