

## The History of Medical English

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The history of the English language all starts with the Germanic tribes that invaded the Britain around the 7<sup>th</sup> Century AD. The word “English” itself comes from the word “Angles” (as in “Anglo-Saxons”), the name of one of these German-speaking tribes.,.

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What happened to the Celtic people who were in Britain before the Germanic invaders came is not sure, but their languages had little influence on the English language, or on medical English. The basic, day to day vocabulary of body parts used by ordinary people and doctors for regions of the body (arm, \_\_\_\_\_), internal organs and tissues (heart \_\_\_\_\_) and common symptoms and diseases (ache, \_\_\_\_\_) therefore come from Anglo-Saxon roots. When the Vikings later invaded parts of the British Isles they brought other simple terms (such as leg) and lots of Scandinavian-sounding words (scalp, \_\_\_\_\_).

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Although English is still grammatically a Germanic language from those early roots, English speakers find it much easier to learn French than German. This is because 60% of the vocabulary of English came from French. In the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, Normans from the North of France invaded England, and for the next 300 years or so all important people in England spoke French as a first language. Because of this background, French words often are more polite, formal or technical than the simple words that came from the Germanic Anglo-Saxon roots. Medical words that came into English from French in the middle ages mainly have a technical but old-fashioned feel (cholera, \_\_\_\_\_). The last example comes from the French for “yellow”, but many of these words originally came from Greek or Latin.

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As in all European languages and many other languages in the world, thousands more medical terms have come into English from Greek and Latin roots over the years. In fact this continues today, with many new drug names being made up from classical roots. The oldest Greek words in medical English go all the way back to the works of the Father of Medicine, Hippocrates, himself (anthrax, asthma, bronchus etc.). The works of Aristotle are the first written source for more (aorta, \_\_\_\_\_ etc.). The last word comes from the Greek for “fox” (alopex) because hair loss reminded the Greeks of this animal.

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Some of these Greek words have even earlier roots, however, in Ancient Egyptian medicine. For example, \_\_\_\_\_ got its name from a site where it was found in abundance, near the shrine of the Egyptian god Ammon.

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When the Romans conquered Greece, they continued using Greek words for some of their discoveries (e.g. asphyxia, \_\_\_\_\_). The last word comes from the Greek word for “cuckoo” because this bone looks like the beak of this bird.

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Eventually, Latin replaced Greek as the source of new medical words in the Roman Empire and beyond. Words that we see for the first time around the first century AD (angina, \_\_\_\_\_) mainly come from Latin, as can still be seen by their Latin looking endings, such as –us and –ium.  
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After the fall of the Roman Empire, Western Europe contributed little to medical and other scientific knowledge, and even forgot the discoveries of the Greeks and Romans. It was left to the Arabs to rediscover and develop Greek knowledge, and Arabic medical words (retina, \_\_\_\_\_) from this period came later into European languages.  
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As the European countries began to rediscover their Roman and Greek heritage around the time of the Renaissance, old and new Greek and Latin words were used more and more for medical vocabulary. Many of these terms would be unrecognizable to a Greek or Roman from the past, as they combine Greek and Arabic (\_\_\_\_\_), Greek and Latin (appendicitis, \_\_\_\_\_) etc. in a very similar way to how new expressions are created now in “Japanese English”. There are also pairs of words from Greek and Latin with exactly the same meaning (\_\_\_\_\_).  
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Along with more and more new “Latin” and “Greek” words, many newly discovered diseases and cures are named after people (\_\_\_\_\_), places (\_\_\_\_\_) and mythical figures (\_\_\_\_\_). One (\_\_\_\_\_) is named after the American Legion club where this disease first was known to break out.  
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As the world has become more international over the last thousand years or so, words in English and medical English have been borrowed literally from all over the world- French (\_\_\_\_\_), German (\_\_\_\_\_), Portuguese (\_\_\_\_\_), African languages (tsetse), Italian (\_\_\_\_\_), Japanese (\_\_\_\_\_) etc. And finally, as the big multinational companies are taking over our lives, their brand names are taking over Medical English as well (\_\_\_\_\_).  
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**Put these words into the gaps**

Aspirin, lanolin, milk of magnesia, band-aid, Vaseline, adrenalin,

Liver, lung, blood, bone, fat

Back, breast, hand, head, neck

Itch, measles, sore, wart, wound

Melancholy, plague, jaundice,

Skin, skull

epiglottis, pancreas, alopecia

ammonia

diabetes, eczema, trachoma, coccyx

caries, delirium, fistula, mucus, radius, scabies, tibia, verruca, vertebra, virus

alcohol, alkali, soda, sugar

hypodermic/ subcutaneous (under the skin)

alcoholism

radiology, hypertension,

Parkinson's disease

Lyme disease- after a town in Connecticut

Gestalt, antibody (translation from Antikörper),

Morphine- after Morpheus, the god of sleep

Legionnaire's disease

Grand mal, petit mal, glucose,

Albino (little white one)

Pellagra, malaria (bad air),

Sodoku, tsutsugamushi (dangerous bug)

**Answer key**

Back, breast, hand, head, neck

Liver, lung, blood, bone, fat

Itch, measles, sore, wart, wound

Skin, skull

epiglottis, pancreas, alopecia

Melancholy, migraine, plague, jaundice,

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alcoholism

radiology, hypertension,

hypodermic/ subcutaneous (under the skin)

Parkinson's disease

Lyme disease- after a town in Connecticut

Morphine- after Morpheus, the god of sleep, and atrophy

Legionnaire's disease

Grand mal, petit mal, glucose,

Gestalt, antibody (translation from Antikörper),

Albino (little white one)

Pellagra, malaria (bad air),

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