

## Vocabulary: Understanding Basic Medical Concepts

key

1. **Cause:** (n) The cause of a disease is that which brings it about, e.g. the cause of influenza is a virus. Some diseases have only one **cause**; others have several **causes**.

2. **Risk factors:** (n) variables that increase the chances of developing a particular disease

Age is not a cause of influenza; rather, it is a **risk factor** since it may increase the chances of someone developing it.

3. **Incubation period:** (n) the the period which elapses between exposure to the causes of a disease and the attack resulting from it; the time of development of the supposed germs or spores.

The **incubation period** lasts three weeks, after which the symptoms appear.

4. **Transmission:** (n) the means by which a disease is spread.

Some diseases **are transmitted** by respiratory droplets that are passed into the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

5. **Contagious:** (adj) capable of being spread by bodily contact with an infected person or object.

A highly **contagious** disease is one which is spread very easily.

### 6. Signs vs. Symptoms

**Sign:** (n) an objective evidence of disease especially as observed and interpreted by the physician rather than by the patient.

**Symptom:** (n) an indicator of a particular disease as observed by the patient

A rash is both a **sign** and a **symptom** of chickenpox.

7. **To monitor:** (v) to carefully observe the progress of a patient during or after a disease or procedure, while the patient is recovering. A machine that is attached to a patient to keep track of his vital signs is called a **monitor** (n).

During surgery, a patient's vital signs **are monitored**.

8. **Vital signs:** (n) indicators that a person is alive and not in danger of undergoing a medical emergency

Pulse and heart rate are two *vital signs*.

9. **Progression:** (n) moving forward in development

As a disease *progresses*, the patient often becomes more ill before he recovers.

10. **Fatal:** (n) deadly; resulting in death **Fatality** (n) a death resulting from a disease, accident or disaster

The flu pandemic in 1918 was responsible for many *fatalities*.

11. **Diagnosis:** (n) identification of a disease by its signs and symptoms The verb is "to diagnose."

*Diagnosis* typically precedes treatment.

12. **Prognosis:** (n) a forecast regarding the outcome of a disease

Although the patient was suffering from cancer, his *prognosis* was good because most people with that kind of cancer recover.

13. **Treatment:** (n) that which is recommended by a doctor in order to recover from an illness or relieve its symptoms It is important to note that **treatment** may or may not **cure** (v, meaning restore to health) a patient.

14. **Prevention:** (n) keeping from occurring

Vaccines are the best method of *prevention* for influenza.

15. **a complication vs. a relapse**

**Complication:** (n) A secondary disease or a negative reaction occurring during the course of an illness that usually worsens the illness

Although the patient appeared to be recovering, he developed *complications* that resulted in his death.

**Relapse:** (n) a recurrence of illness after a period of recovering A patient may have a relapse for a number of reasons, including the development of complications. "Relapse" may also be used as a verb.

Sometimes cancer patients appear to have recovered but then they have a *relapse*.

## 16. a sedative vs. an anesthetic

**Sedative:** (n) medication that is given to relax the patient. The verb form is "to sedate."

**Anesthetic:** (n) medication given to numb sensation so that the patient will not feel pain A **general anesthetic** causes a loss in consciousness. A **local anesthetic** numbs a particular part of the body so that the patient will not feel pain in that region; he remains conscious, however.

**To anesthetize:** (v) the act of giving anesthesia to a patient A general anesthetic is often administered **intravenously**, or via a drip that is inserted in a vein.

**Anesthesia:** (n) refers to the state induced by an anesthetic, but it is also used as a synonym for **anesthetic**, the drug, as well

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## 17. chronic vs. acute

**Chronic:** (adj.) having a slow progressive course of indefinite duration -- used especially to describe degenerative diseases

**Acute:** (adj.) having a sudden onset, sharp rise, and short course; can apply to a condition, such as an inflammation, or a disease

## 18. What is the difference between disease, syndrome, disorder, and condition?

**Disease:** (n) an impairment of the normal state of health or one of its parts that interrupts or modifies the performance of vital functions

**Syndrome:** (n) a group of signs and symptoms that occur together and characterize a particular abnormality

**Disorder:** (n) an abnormal physical or mental condition

**Condition:** (n) a defective state of health