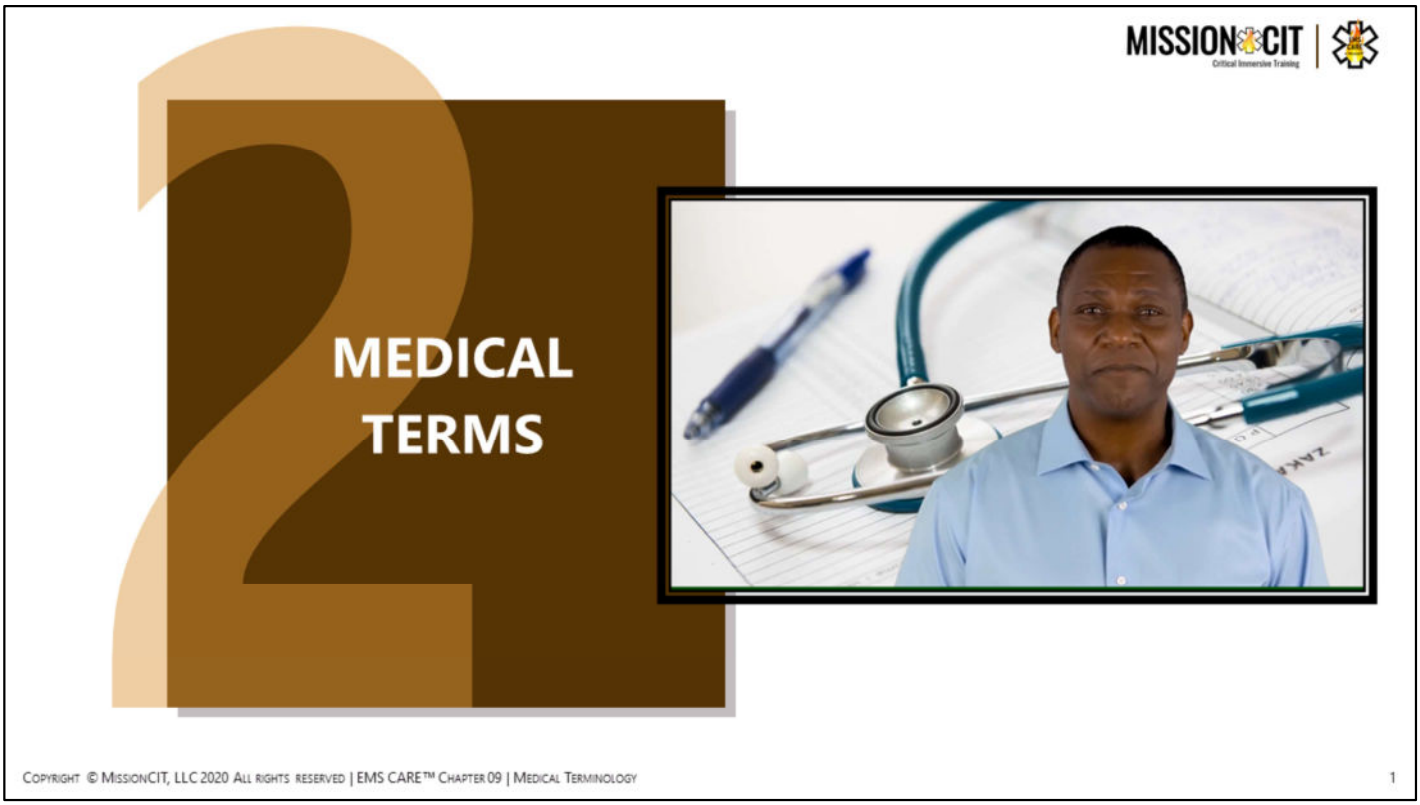
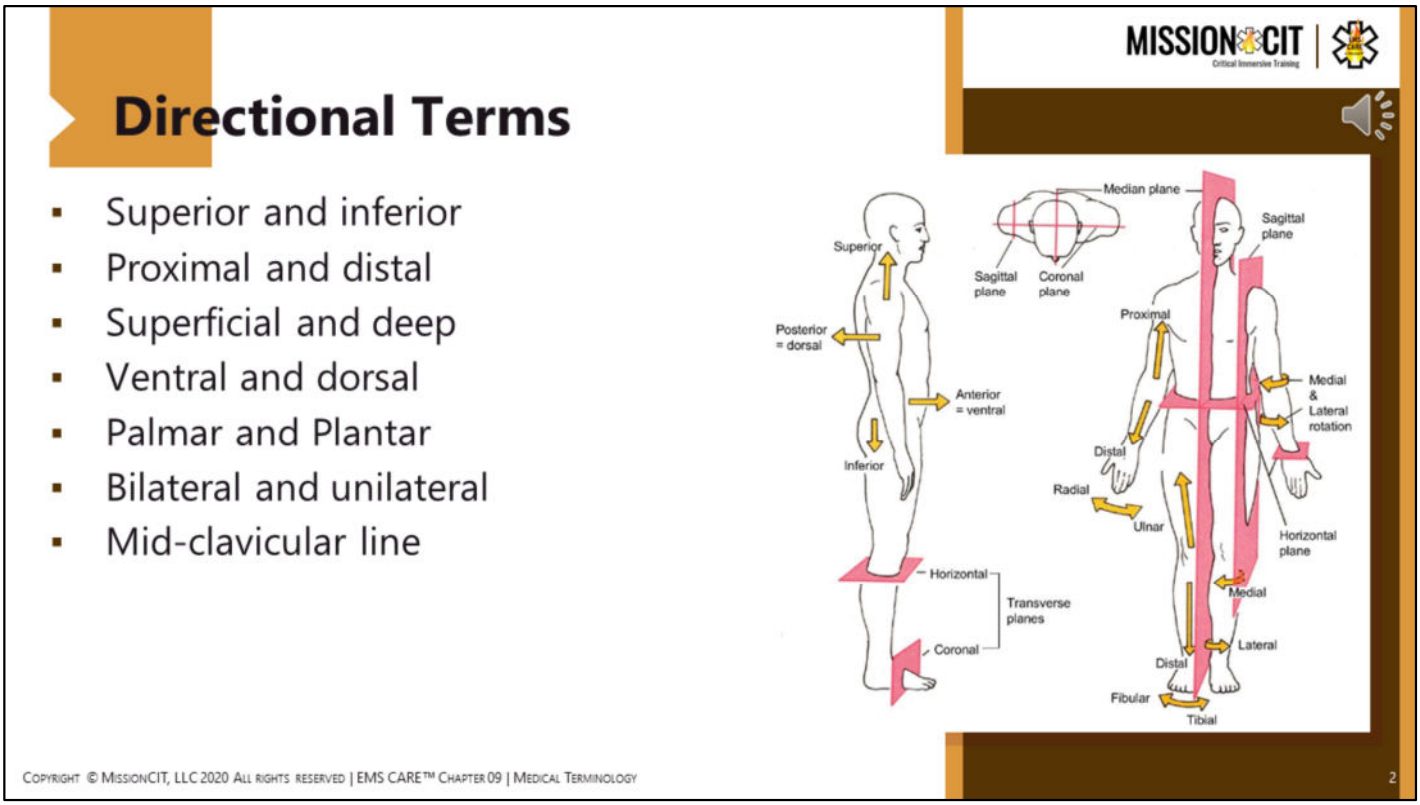


Thank you, Missah!

In this lesson, we will delve deeper into the words that can give you a better idea of what a medical term means.

All medical terms are broadly divided into two categories, namely, anatomy and physiology. While anatomy describes the body structure, physiology is all about the body's functions.

Let's first look into the anatomical words.



Before we go in, think for a moment about some of the common words you'll use to describe the body's position.

They are usually forward-facing, backwards-facing, hands by the side, palms facing forward, etc.

Now, what about the relative position of something?

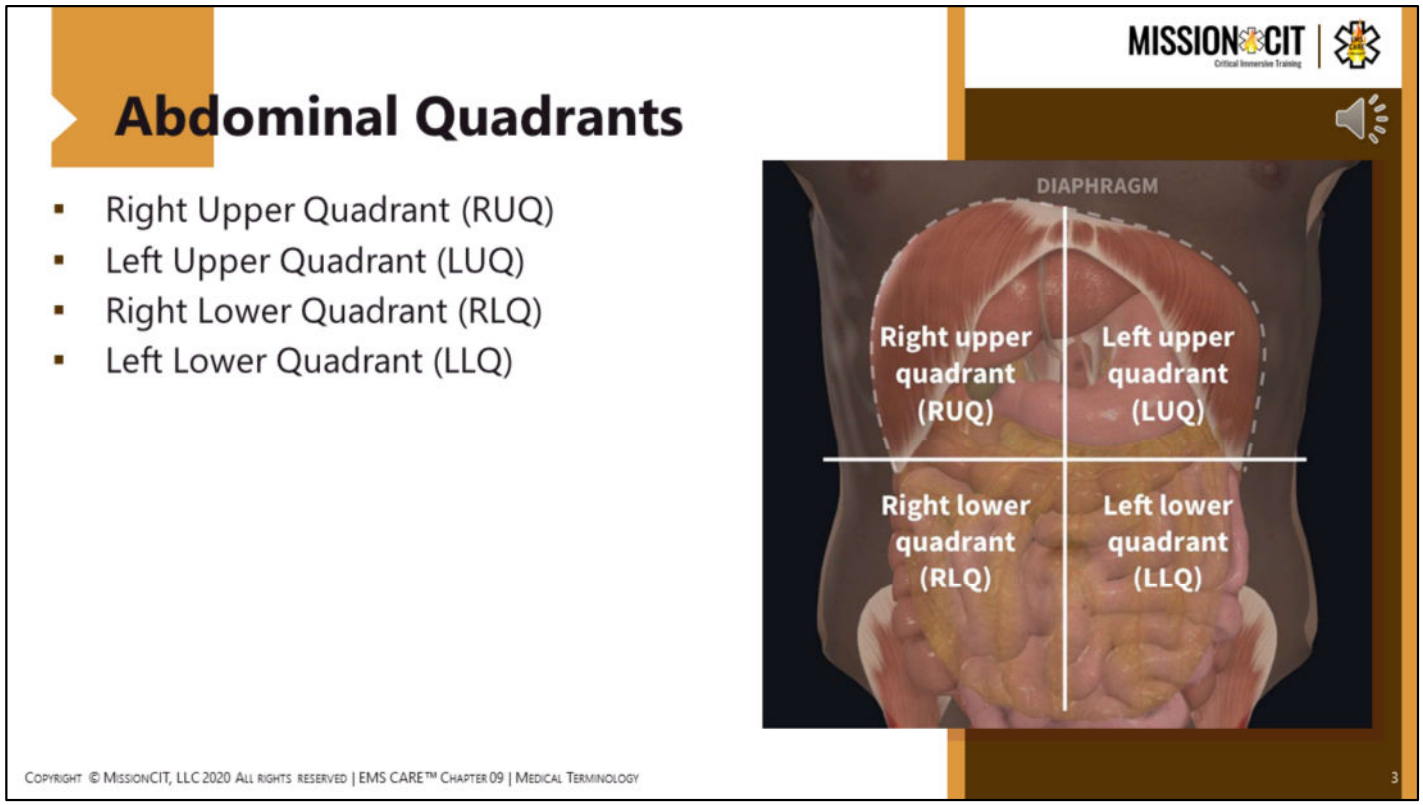
For this, the body is divided into planes. Midline is the central line of the body, and medial is a term used to describe something closer to the midline while lateral is a term used to describe something farther from the midline.

In the medical world, anatomical positions are described as a directional phrase. Let's look at the commonly used directional phrases.

- Superior and inferior. Superior is nearer to the head while inferior is closer to the feet. Both these are relative terms that describe the relationship of one structure to another.
- Proximal and distal. The terms proximal and distal are used to describe the relationship of any two structures on an extremity. While proximal describes structures that are closer to the trunk, distal describes structures that are farther from the trunk or nearer to the free end of the extremity.
- Superficial and deep. Superficial means closer to or on the skin while deep means farther inside the body or tissue, and away from the skin.
- Ventral and dorsal - Ventral refers to the belly side of the body, or the anterior surface of

the body while dorsal refers to the spinal side of the body, or the posterior surface of the body, think of the dorsal fin of a dolphin, which is on its back. More common phrases used instead of ventral and dorsal are anterior and posterior respectively.

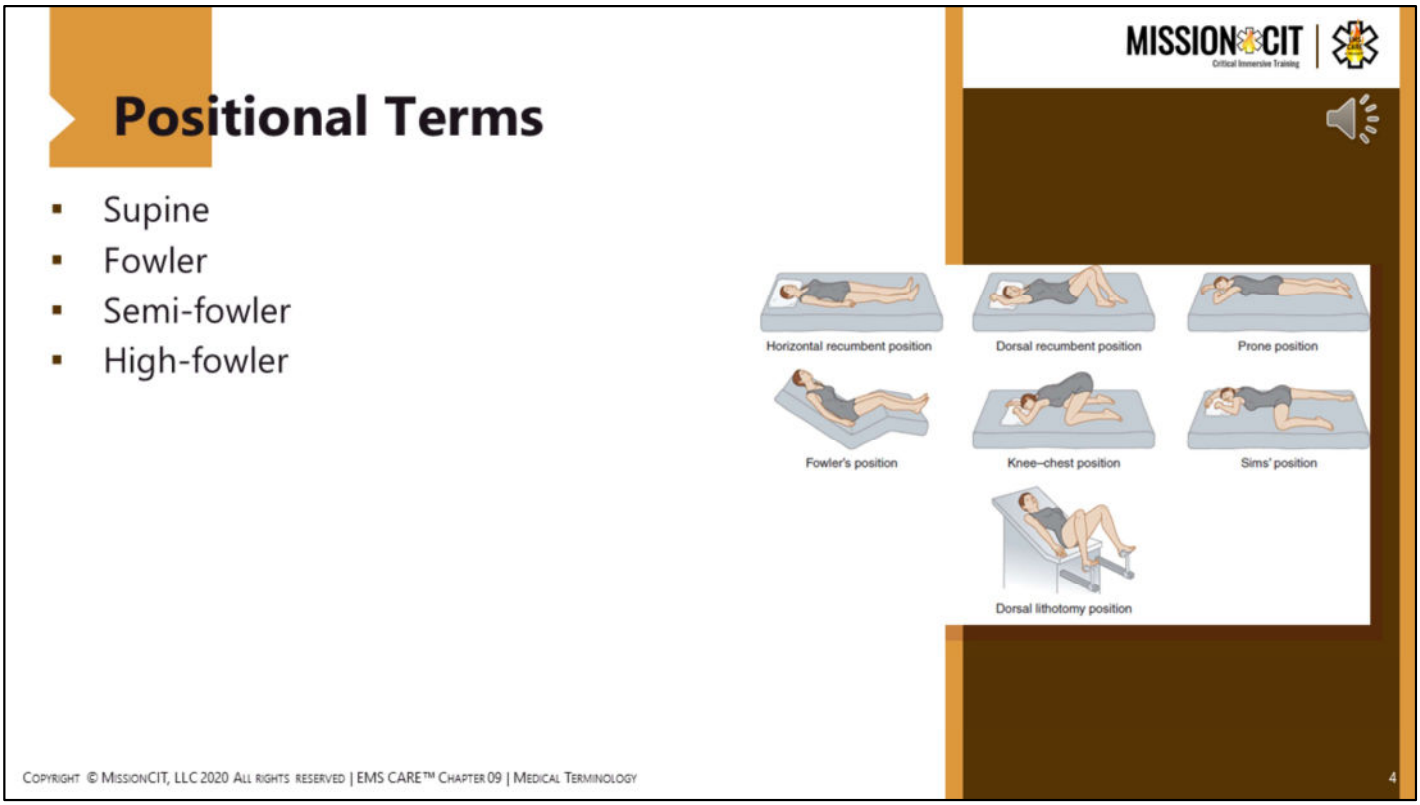
- Palmar and Plantar. The front region of the hand is referred to as the palm or palmar surface and the bottom of the foot is referred to as the plantar surface. On that note, apex or apices describe the tip of a structure.
- Bilateral and unilateral – Bilateral is both sides while unilateral is just one side.
- The mid-clavicular line is an imaginary line that divides the chest into regions. As there are two clavicles, there are two mid-clavicular lines.



Abdominal quadrants are the horizontal and vertical lines that divide an abdomen into four parts. These quadrants can help you to better distinguish the internal organs and describe them.

The four quadrants are:

- Right Upper Quadrant (RUQ)
- Left Upper Quadrant (LUQ)
- Right Lower Quadrant (RLQ), and
- Left Lower Quadrant (LLQ)



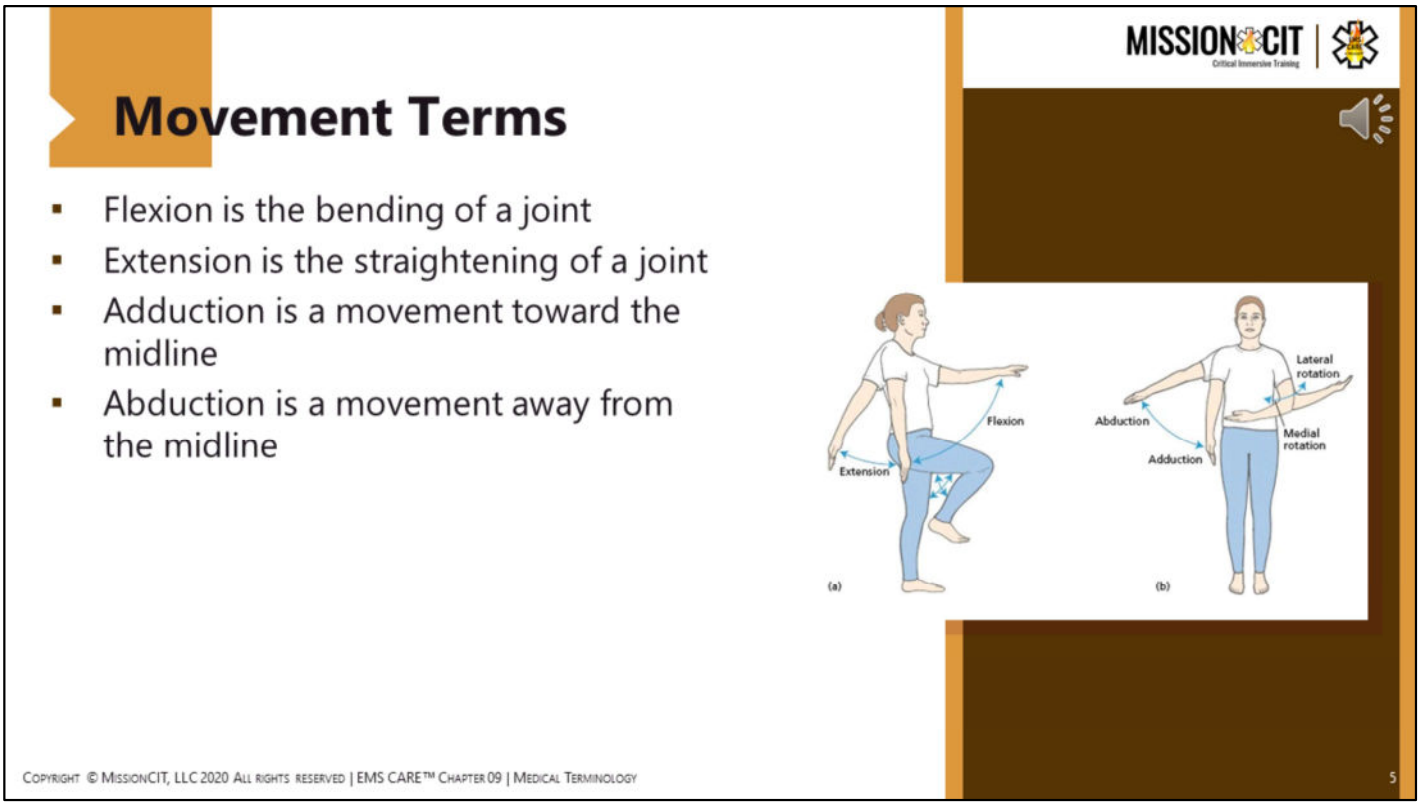
Moving on, let's see how the position of something is described in medical terms.

Many terms are used to describe the position of the patient on your arrival or during transport to the emergency department. Two frequent terms used in this context are supine and fowler. The body is in the prone position when lying face down; the body is in the supine position when lying face up.

The Fowler position, on the other hand, is a semi-reclining position with the head elevated to help the patient breathe easier and to control the airway. A patient who is sitting upright is said to be in the Fowler position. This position can be further categorized into:

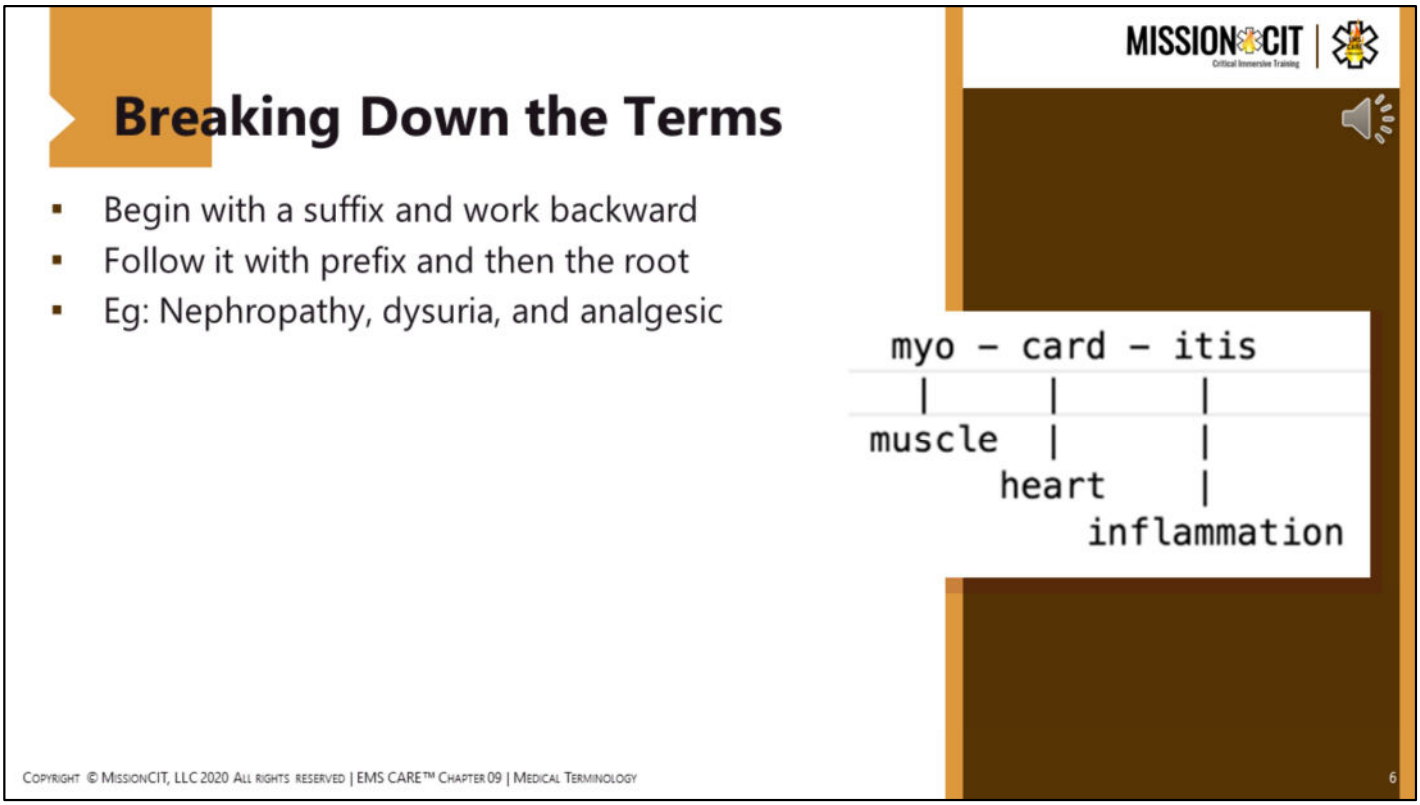
- A semi-Fowler position is where the patient sits with the back of the stretcher at a 45-degree angle
- A high-Fowler position is where the patient sits at a 90-degree angle

Finally, there's a recovery position where the patient is lying on one side. This is the most preferred position for any unconscious non-trauma patient.



The last one we'll see is the movement terms. The four common terms in this context are:

- Flexion is the bending of a joint.
- An extension is the straightening of a joint.
- Adduction is a movement toward the midline.
- Abduction is a movement away from the midline.



You can use the above-mentioned meaning of parts to decipher the meaning of a term. Here are some suggestions to get a precise meaning.

- When trying to define a term, begin with the suffix and work backwards.
- If the term also contains a prefix, define the suffix, then the prefix, and then the word root. Here are some examples of how you can do it.

For the word nephropathy, break down the word into 2 parts, namely nephr, o, and pathy. Work from the suffix. The word pathy means disease while the letter o is just a combining term. The word nephr means kidney. So, overall, the term nephropathy means disease of the kidney.

Another example is Dysuria that can be broken into dys, ur, and ia. Start from the suffix, ia that means a condition of. Next, move to the prefix, which is dys, meaning difficult, painful, or abnormal. The root word is ur, meaning urine. So, dysuria is a pain when urinating or difficulty urinating.

Let's look at one more. Hyperemesis can be divided into hyper and emesis. Since there's no suffix, start with the prefix hyper, meaning excessive. The root word emesis means vomiting. So, hyperemesis is excessive vomiting.

The last example we'll see is Analgesic that can be broken down into an, alges, and ic. Start with the suffix, ic, which means pertaining to. Move to the prefix, an, meaning without or absence of. Finally, the root word alges, which means pain. So, analgesic means pertaining to

no pain.

We hope these examples give you a good idea of how you can break down medical terms to understand what they mean.

In the next lesson, Missah will talk about the commonly used abbreviations and symbols.