

## Medical Terms that Patients May not Understand:

Studies on health literacy have indicated that persons with limited literacy skills often have a poor understanding of basic medical vocabulary and healthcare concepts. According to the American Medical Association health literacy manual for clinicians, a study in a health clinic found that many patients did not understand the meanings of words that clinicians use regularly in talking with patients. Additionally, “medical speak” is often filled with acronyms that hold little meaning outside of the healthcare context. The list below contains common medical words that patients with limited health literacy may not understand and some “translations” to plain language.

<b>Medical Term</b>	<b>Plain Language</b>
• Blood in the stool	Blood in your poop
• Bowel	Intestines
• Screening	Test
• Analgesic	Pain Killer
• Benign	Not cancer
• Cardiac Problem	Heart problem
• Void	Go pee
• Monitor	Keep track of
• Lipids	Fats in the blood
• Cellulitis	Skin infection
• Contraception	Birth control
• Hypertension	High blood pressure
• BMI	Body mass index: measure of body fat
• Oral	By mouth
• Referral	Send you to another doctor
• Menses	Period

Many people will NOT stop a healthcare provider and ask for an explanation for fear of appearing stupid. They will simply nod their heads and try and piece together information from the context of the conversation. Using a universal precautions approach when speaking with patients is best: assume that everyone needs plain language! What words do you use in diabetes education that may need a plain language alternative?