

## General Glossary

**Abrasion:** Superficial wound that damages only the outermost layers of skin or *cornea*.

**Abscess:** A localized infection isolated from the rest of the body by inflammation. Usually seen as a pocket of pus.

**Acute stress reaction (ASR):** Autonomic nervous system–controlled response to stress that can cause severe but temporary and reversible changes in vital signs.

**Airway:** The passage for air exchange between the alveoli of the lungs and the outside. Most commonly refers to the upper airway, including the nose, mouth, and trachea.

**Altitude illness:** The constellation of symptoms produced by altitude adjustment, high-altitude cerebral edema, and high-altitude pulmonary edema. Can be mild, moderate, or severe.

**Alveoli:** Membranous air sacks in the lungs where gas is exchanged with the blood.

**Amnesia:** Loss of memory, usually as a symptom of traumatic brain injury.

**Anaphylaxis:** Systemic allergic reaction involving generalized edema of all body surfaces, vascular shock, and respiratory distress.

**Angina:** The pain of myocardial ischemia. Also called *angina pectoris*. May be stable or unstable.

**Antibiotic:** A drug that selectively kills or interferes with the function or reproduction of bacteria.

**Anticipated problems (A'):** Problems that may develop over time as a result of injury, illness, or environmental factors.

**Antifungal:** A drug that selectively kills or interferes with the function or reproduction of pathogenic fungi.

**Antiviral:** A drug that selectively kills or interferes with the function or reproduction of viruses.

**Arrhythmia:** Abnormal heart rhythm. Also called a *dysrhythmia*.

**Aspiration:** Inhaling vomit, blood, or other material into the lungs.

**Basic life support (BLS):** The generic process of supporting the functions of the circulatory, respiratory, and nervous systems using CPR, bleeding control, and spine stabilization.

**Blood pressure cuff:** Also known as a sphygmomanometer. Used for measuring blood pressure.

**Capillaries:** The smallest blood vessels in body tissues where gases and nutrients are exchanged between tissue cells and the circulating blood.



- Cardiac arrest:** Loss of effective heart activity.
- Cardiogenic shock:** Shock due to inadequate pumping action of the heart.
- Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR):** A technique for artificially circulating oxygenated blood in the absence of effective heart activity. Includes positive pressure ventilation (PPV) and chest compressions.
- Carotid pulse:** The pulse felt on the side of the neck at the site of the carotid artery.
- Cartilage:** Connective tissue on the ends of bones at joints that provide a smooth gliding surface.
- Central nervous system:** The brain and spinal cord.
- Cervical spine:** The section of the spine in the neck between the base of the skull and the top of the thorax.
- Cold challenge:** The combined cooling influence of wind, humidity, and ambient temperature.
- Cold response:** The normal body response to the cold challenge, including shell/core effect and shivering.
- Compartment syndrome:** Swelling within a confined body compartment, like the connective tissue compartments in the leg or inside the skull, that produces pressure that interferes with perfusion. Can cause ischemia to infarction.
- Compensation:** Involuntary changes in body functions designed to maintain perfusion pressure and oxygenation of vital body tissues in the presence of injury or illness.
- Concussion:** Brain injury, typically from impact or concussive force. Also called *closed head injury* or *traumatic brain injury*.
- Conjunctiva:** The membrane covering the white of the eye and the inner surfaces of the eyelids.
- Conjunctivitis:** Inflammation of the conjunctiva due to irritation, infection, or injury. Most often used in reference to infection (pink eye).
- Cornea:** The clear part of the eye over the iris and pupil.
- Cornice:** An overhanging drift of snow formed as wind blows over a ridge or mountaintop.
- Crepitus:** The feel or sound of bones or cartilage grating when moved; typically at the site of an unstable fracture. Can also describe the feel or sound of subcutaneous air when palpated.
- Cyanosis:** The blue color seen in the lips and skin of a patient with poor tissue oxygenation. This is actually the color of deoxygenated hemoglobin.



**Debridement:** Wound cleaning, including removal of foreign material and devitalized tissue.

**Definitive treatment:** Therapy that cures the disease or corrects the problem.

**Dental abscess:** Infection at the base of a tooth.

**Diagnosis:** The identification of a medical problem by name. May be generic or specific. Also called *assessment* or *problem list*.

**Diaphragm:** Muscle at the lower end of the chest cavity that contracts to create a vacuum that draws air into the lungs. The diaphragm works with muscles of the chest wall, shoulders, and neck to perform ventilation.

**Discharge:** Fluid escaping from the site of infection or inflammation. Also called *exudate*.

**Dislocation:** Disruption of normal joint anatomy.

**Distal:** An anatomical direction; away from the body center. The wrist is distal to the elbow.

**Dysrhythmia:** An abnormal heart rhythm. Also called *arrhythmia*.

**Edema:** Swelling due to leaking of serum from capillaries.

**Epinephrine:** The synthetic form of the hormone adrenalin. Used to constrict blood vessels and dilate airway tubes.

**Evacuation:** Transferring a patient from the scene of injury or illness to definitive medical care.

**Extension:** Movement at a joint that extends an extremity away from the center of the body. The opposite of *flexion*.

**Extrication:** Removing or freeing a patient from entrapment or confinement.

**Exudate:** Discharge from a wound.

**Femoral artery:** Large artery that travels along the femur in the thigh.

**Femur:** Long bone of the thigh.

**Flail chest:** The loss of structural integrity of the chest wall due to multiple rib fractures.

**Flexion:** Movement of a joint that brings the extremity closer to the body. The opposite of *extension*.

**Fracture:** Broken bone, cartilage, or solid organ.

**Frostbite:** Frozen tissue. May be partial thickness or deep.

**Frostnip:** Loss of circulation due to the vasoconstriction of blood vessels in the skin during the early stages of tissue freezing. Also called *superficial frostbite*.

**Glaucoma:** Disease or condition causing increased pressure within the globe of the eye.



**Head injury:** Injury to the brain. Also called *concussion*.

**Heart attack:** Heart muscle ischemia caused by a blood clot or spasm of the coronary arteries, or an arrhythmia, resulting in the necrosis (or infarction) of heart tissue.

**Heat challenge:** Combined effects of ambient temperature and metabolic activity, which contribute to body heating.

**Heat exhaustion:** Compensated volume shock caused by fluid loss due to sweating.

**Heat response:** The normal body response to the heat challenge, including sweating and vasodilation of the shell.

**Heat stroke:** Severe elevation of body temperature (above 40°C, or 104°F).

**Hemothorax:** Blood in the chest cavity as a result of injury, usually collecting between the chest wall and lung tissue.

**Hyperextension:** To extend a joint beyond its normal range of motion.

**Hyperventilation syndrome:** Respiratory alkalosis. The nervous system symptoms of numbness, visual field contraction, and light-headedness caused by reduced carbon dioxide in the blood due to excessive ventilation, usually associated with acute stress reaction.

**Hypoglycemia:** Low blood sugar.

**Hypothermia:** Below normal body core temperature (37°C, or 98.6°F).

**Infarction:** Tissue death due to loss of perfusion and oxygenation. Necrosis.

**Infection:** Pathologic colonization of body tissues by bacteria, virus, fungus, or other microorganisms.

**Inflammation:** A generic body response to illness or injury resulting in redness, swelling, warmth, and tenderness.

**Intoxication:** Altered level of consciousness or mental status due to the influence of chemicals such as drugs, alcohol, and inhaled gases.

**Intracranial:** Inside the skull (cranium).

**Intravenous fluids:** Fluids infused directly into the circulatory system through a hypodermic needle inserted into a vein, usually used to temporarily increase the volume of circulating blood or restore fluid lost to sweating or diarrhea.

**Intubation:** Placing an endotracheal tube into the trachea.

**Involuntary guarding:** Refers to abdominal muscle spasm to protect the abdomen from painful movement. Considered a sign of peritoneal irritation.



**Ischemia:** Lack of local perfusion to body tissues. Can be caused by a clot, constriction, shell/core effect, or tight splint. Persistent ischemia will result in infarction.

**Level of consciousness:** Describes the level of brain function in terms of responsiveness to specific stimuli (the AVPU Scale): A = Awake, V = responds to Verbal stimuli, P = responds to Painful stimuli, U = Unresponsive to any stimuli.

**Ligaments:** Tough connective tissue joining bone to bone across joints.

**Local effects:** Effects that are restricted to the immediate area of injury or infection (versus systemic effects).

**Long bones:** Bones that have a long structural axis, such as leg and arm bones, as opposed to flat bones like ribs and shoulder blade.

**Lower airway:** Trachea, bronchi, alveoli.

**Lumbar spine:** The lower section of the spine between the thorax and the pelvis.

**Mechanism of injury (MOI):** The cause of injury, or a description of the forces involved.

**Mental status:** Describes the level of brain function in an awake patient (A on AVPU) in terms of memory, orientation, level of anxiety, and behavior.

**Mid-range position:** Position in a joint's range of motion between full extension and full flexion. Also called *neutral position*.

**Near drowning:** At least temporary survival of water inhalation.

**Neutral position:** The position approximately halfway between flexion and extension. Also called the *mid-range position*.

**Open fracture:** Fracture with an associated break in the skin. Also called a *compound fracture*.

**Oxygenation:** To saturate blood with oxygen in the lungs. Also describes the transfer of oxygen from the blood to body cells (cellular oxygenation).

**Parasthesia:** Neurological deficit, usually described as weakness or numbness and tingling.

**Patella:** Kneecap.

**Pathologic:** Harmful to the body. Usually used to describe bacteria, fungus, or virus.

**Patient assessment system:** A system of surveys including scene size-up, primary survey, and secondary survey designed to gather information about an injured or ill patient and the environment in which he or she is found.

**Perfusion:** The passage of blood through capillary beds in body tissues.



**Peripheral nerves:** The nerves running between body tissues and the spinal cord.

**Photophobia:** Eye pain or headache caused by bright lights.

**Pneumonia:** Infection of lung tissue resulting in the accumulation of fluid in the alveoli.

**Pneumothorax:** Free air in the chest cavity, usually from a punctured lung or chest wall.

**Polypro:** Slang for polypropylene clothing.

**Primary assessment:** The second stage of the patient assessment system, and the initial examination of the patient. Looks for life-threatening problems with the circulatory, respiratory, and nervous systems. Also called *primary survey*.

**Proximal:** Toward the center of the body. The elbow is proximal to the wrist.

**Pulmonary edema:** Swelling of lung tissue resulting in the collection of fluid in the alveoli.

**Rales:** The noise produced by pulmonary edema. Sounds like crinkling cellophane or air being sucked through a wet sponge.

**Reduction:** Restoring a dislocated joint to normal position. Also, restoring a displaced fracture to normal anatomic position.

**Rhonchi:** Sound produced by mucus or fluid in the lower airways.

**Scene size-up:** The first stage of the patient assessment system during which you look for dangers to the rescuer and patient, numbers of people injured, and the mechanism of injury.

**Secondary assessment:** The third stage in the patient assessment system, which includes the examination of the whole body, SAMPLE history, and vital signs. Also called *secondary survey*.

**Seizure:** Uncoordinated electrical activity in the brain.

**Sepsis:** Systemic infection.

**Serum:** The liquid portion of the blood, as distinguished from blood cells and platelets.

**Sexually transmitted infection (STI):** Infection transmitted from person to person by sexual activity.

**Shell/core compensation:** Vasoconstriction in the skin and gut to shunt blood to vital body organs. Occurs as a result of volume shock and cold response.

**Shell/core effect:** A compensation mechanism seen in shock and cold response that reduces blood flow to the body shell in order to preserve perfusion and warmth in the vital organs of the core. Can also be reversed in core/shell effect.



**Shock:** Inadequate perfusion pressure in the circulatory system resulting in inadequate tissue oxygenation.

**Signs:** Response elicited by examination, e.g., pain when the examiner touches an injured area (tenderness).

**Sinus:** Hollow spaces in the bones of the skull lined with mucous membrane.

**Sinusitis:** Inflammation of the membranous lining of the sinuses due to infection, allergy, or toxic exposure. Usually used in reference to infection.

**Spasm:** Involuntary contraction of muscle.

**Spinal cord:** The cordlike extension of the brain encased within the bones of the spinal column, running from the base of the brain to the mid-lumbar spine.

**Spine:** The column of bony vertebrae extending from the base of the skull to the pelvis. Includes the bones, ligaments, cartilage, and spinal cord.

**Stethoscope:** An instrument used to transmit body sounds directly to the ears of the examiner via rubber tubes.

**Stridor:** Stuttering or whistling sound made by inhalation against an upper airway obstruction.

**Sublingual:** Under the tongue. Usually refers to a route of medication administration such as a sublingual tablet of nitroglycerine or morphine.

**Survey:** A systematic examination of the scene and the patient.

**Swelling:** Abnormal fluid accumulation in body tissues due to bleeding or edema.

**Symptomatic treatment:** Therapy that relieves symptoms but does not necessarily treat the cause.

**Symptom:** Condition described by the patient, e.g., pain on swallowing.

**Synovial fluid:** Joint fluid lubricating the inside of a joint.

**Systemic:** Involving the entire body, such as a systemic infection or systemic allergy.

**Tetanus:** Nervous system spasm and paralysis caused by the toxin released by *Clostridium tetani* bacteria. Also called *lockjaw*.

**Thorax:** The chest, or chest cavity.

**Tourniquet:** A constricting band used to prevent the flow of blood to an extremity.

**Toxin:** Chemical that has a damaging effect on body tissues or the function of the nervous system.



- Toxin load:** The combined systemic effect of numerous small toxic exposures, such as a large number of insect bites or man-of-war stings.
- Traction:** Tension applied along the long axis of an extremity.
- Traction splint:** A splinting device designed to maintain traction on an extremity, primarily used for femur fractures in a field setting.
- Trauma:** Injury.
- Traumatic brain injury:** Injury to the brain. Also called *closed head injury* or *concussion*.
- Trench foot:** Inflammation due to ischemia caused by cold-induced vasoconstriction during prolonged exposure to cold and wet conditions.
- Umbilicus:** Navel, belly button.
- Universal precautions:** Set of precautions or procedures to minimize the risk of disease transmission via contact with infected body fluids. Includes gloves, eye protection, face shields or masks, protective clothing, and the use of disinfectants. Universal precautions also includes proper procedures for handling and disposing of contaminated articles and instruments. Also called *standard precautions*.
- Upper airway:** Mouth, nose, throat (larynx).
- Vapor barrier:** A vapor-proof wrap or covering that prevents evaporative cooling.
- Vascular bundle:** A grouped nerve, artery, and vein following the same pathway.
- Vascular shock:** Shock due to dilation of blood vessels.
- Vasodilation:** Dilation of blood vessels.
- Ventilation:** The movement of air in and out of the lungs.
- Vertebrae:** The bones of the spine.
- Vital signs:** Measurements of body function including blood pressure, pulse, respiration, level of consciousness, skin color, and body core temperature.