Prefixes and Suffixes in Medical Terms

After studying this chapter, you will be able to:

▶ Define common medical prefixes
▶ Define common medical suffixes
▶ Describe how word parts are put together to form words

Medical Prefixes and Suffixes

In Chapter 1, you learned about the four basic word parts—word roots, combining forms, prefixes, and suffixes, and you learned the important medical roots and combining forms. In this chapter, you learn the important medical prefixes and suffixes and how word parts are put together to form medical terminology.
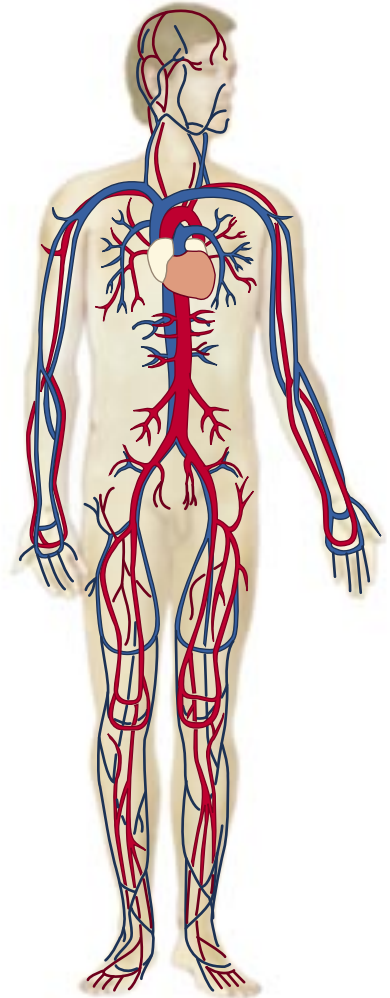
Prefixes

Prefixes are word parts that modify the meaning of the word or word root. They attach to the beginning of words. Prefixes tend to indicate size, quantity, position, presence of, and location. When trying to understand a word with a prefix, you can take apart the word, find the meaning of each part, and take a guess at the meaning of the original word. For example, terms for paralysis include *paraplegia*, *hemiplegia*, and *quadriplegia*. By taking apart the three terms, you can deduce the meaning of each of these three medical terms.

> para- = abnormal; involving two parts + -plegia = paralysis
>
> hemi- = half
>
> quadri- = four

Sometimes you need to choose the most likely definition, or you need to reason out a meaning that is not quite the prefix plus the root but is a meaning that makes sense. *Paraplegia* is paralysis of the two lower limbs; *hemiplegia* is paralysis of one side; and *quadriplegia* is paralysis of all four limbs. The meaning "limbs" is not contained specifically in the prefix but it is understood from the combination of the numbers in the prefix's meaning and the root meaning paralysis—so "two paralysis" is paralysis of the two lower limbs (since you cannot have paralysis of just the upper limbs).

To learn more about paralysis and what is being done to cure it, go to the National Spinal Cord Injury Association's Web site (www.spinalcord.org).