

Medical Terminology

Flashcard Study Guide

Chapter 23: Special Senses

Each card contains: **Term** | Syllables · *Pronunciation* | Definition | 💡 *Memory trick*

71 terms

Accommodation

ac · com · mo · da · tion uh-kom-oh-DAY-shun

The automatic adjustment of the eye's lens to focus on objects at different distances. The ciliary muscle contracts/relaxes to change lens thickness and shape.

💡 *'Accommodate' = adjust/adapt. Your eye 'accommodates' to what you're looking at — near or far. Same word used in hotels: 'accommodation' = adjusting space for a guest. Your eye accommodates by adjusting its lens.*

Amblyopia

am · bly · o · pi · a am-blee-OH-pee-uh

Reduced vision in one eye that is not due to any structural eye problem — the brain ignores signals from the weaker eye. Also called 'lazy eye.' Occurs in childhood; treated with patching the dominant eye.

💡 *'Ambly' = dull/dim (Greek) + 'opia' = vision. 'Lazy eye' — the eye is not damaged, the brain just gets 'lazy' about using it. The '-opia' suffix appears in many eye terms: myopia, hyperopia, diplopia. 'Opia' = VISION.*

Aqueous humor

a · que · ous hu · mor

AY-kwee-us HYOO-mor

The clear, watery fluid that fills the anterior (front) chamber of the eye, between the cornea and the lens. Maintains eye pressure and nourishes the cornea and lens.

💡 *'Aqueous' = water (Latin 'aqua'). 'Humor' = fluid (Latin). Aqueous = watery fluid in the FRONT of the eye. Vitreous = gel in the BACK. Memory: 'Aqua' = water = front/clear. 'Vitro' = glass-like = back/gel.*

Astigmatism

a · stig · ma · tism uh-STIG-muh-tiz-um

A vision impairment caused by an irregular curve in the cornea or lens, resulting in blurred or distorted vision at all distances. Corrected with cylindrical lenses.

💡 *'A' (without) + 'stigma' (Greek: point/mark). The eye cannot focus to a single point — images are blurry everywhere. Say: uh-STIG-muh-tiz-um. In Spanish it's 'astigmatismo' — very similar! Many students already know this word.*

Audiology

au · di · ol · o · gy aw-dee-OL-oh-jee

The science and study of hearing, balance, and related disorders. Audiologists diagnose and treat hearing loss, tinnitus, and balance problems.

💡 *'Audio' = hearing/sound (Latin 'audire' = to hear) + 'logy' = study of. You already know 'audio' from audio files, audio equipment, auditorium. An audiologist studies hearing. Related: auditory (hearing), audiogram (hearing test result).*

Blepharitis

bleph · a · ri · tis blef-uh-RY-tis

Inflammation of the eyelid margins, causing redness, swelling, crusting, and irritation at the base of the eyelashes. Often caused by bacterial infection or skin conditions.

💡 *'Blepharo' = eyelid (Greek) + 'itis' = inflammation. 'Itis' always means inflammation! Arthritis (joint inflammation), otitis (ear inflammation), blepharitis (eyelid inflammation). The 'blepharo' root appears in blepharoptosis too.*

Blepharoptosis

bleph · a · rop · to · sis blef-uh-rop-TOH-sis

Drooping of the upper eyelid, caused by weakness or paralysis of the muscle that raises the eyelid (levator palpebrae). Can obstruct vision. Also called 'ptosis.'

💡 *'Blepharo' (eyelid) + 'ptosis' (falling/drooping — Greek 'ptōsis'). 'Ptosis' = drooping/falling. Used alone as a medical term: 'ptosis.' The 'p' is SILENT — say 'TOH- sis' not 'p-TOH-sis.' Like 'pneumonia' — the P is silent.*

Canthus

can · thus

KAN-thus

Either corner where the upper and lower eyelids meet. The inner canthus (medial) is near the nose; the outer canthus (lateral) is toward the ear.

💡 *'Canthi' is the plural. Think: 'CAN-thus' = the corner CAN-junction of the eyelids. Medial canthus = nose side (think: M for Middle/nose). Lateral canthus = ear side (think: L for Lateral/outside).*

Cataract

cat · a · ract

KAT-uh-rakt

A clouding of the normally clear lens of the eye, causing blurry, foggy, or dim vision. Most common in older adults. Treated with surgical removal of the cloudy lens and replacement with an artificial one.

💡 *'Cataract' originally meant 'waterfall' or 'portcullis' (a gate that comes DOWN). The lens 'falls' cloudy, like a gate coming down over vision. Many languages have similar words: Spanish 'catarata,' French 'cataracte.'*

Cerumen

ce · ru · men seh-ROO-men

Earwax — the yellow-brown, waxy substance secreted in the ear canal that traps dust and protects the ear. Excessive cerumen can cause hearing loss.

💡 From Latin 'cera' = wax (like a candle). In Italian/Spanish, 'cera' also means wax. Cerumen = ear wax. Medical term for 'earwax.' Easy to remember: think of a candle's wax dripping — like wax in the ear canal.

Choroid

cho · roid

KOR-oyd

The middle, vascular layer of the eye between the retina and the sclera. Rich in blood vessels that supply oxygen and nutrients to the retina. Part of the uveal tract.

💡 'Chorion' in Greek means 'membrane.' The choroid is a membrane full of blood vessels — like a lining. Rhymes with 'void' and 'android.' Think: 'CHO-roid' — the CHOsen vessel layer ROOTed behind the retina.

Ciliary body

cil · i · ar · y bo · dy

SIL-ee-air-ee

A ring-shaped structure behind the iris that contains the ciliary muscle (controls lens shape for focusing) and produces aqueous humor.

💡 'Cilia' = tiny hair-like structures (Latin). The ciliary body has fine fiber attachments (zonules) that hold the lens — like tiny hairs pulling on a trampoline to change its shape. Two jobs: 1) focus the lens, 2) make aqueous humor.

Cochlea

coch · le · a

KOK-lee-uh

The spiral-shaped, fluid-filled bony structure in the inner ear responsible for converting sound vibrations into nerve signals sent to the brain.

💡 'Cochlea' = Latin for 'snail shell.' It literally looks like a snail shell spiral! If you remember the shape of a snail shell → you remember cochlea. In Spanish, 'cóclea' is identical. Think: COCHLEA = COIL = snail-shaped hearing organ.

Cones

cones konz

Photoreceptor cells in the retina, concentrated in the macula/fovea, responsible for sharp central vision and color perception. Require bright light to function.

💡 Cones are CONE-shaped under the microscope. They detect COLOR and work in bright light. Memory: CONES = COLOR + Crisp daylight vision. Compare to RODS (rod-shaped) = night vision, no color, peripheral. Cones = Color; Rods = dimness.

Conjunctiva

con · junc · ti · va kon-junk-TY-vuh

The clear, thin mucous membrane that lines the inner surface of the eyelids and covers the front of the eye (except the cornea). Keeps the eye moist.

💡 *'Conjunctiva' = Latin 'conjungere' = to join together. It 'joins' the eyelid and the eyeball. The 'conjunct' root appears in English: conjunction (joining words), conjunctivitis (inflammation of the conjunctiva). 'Itis' = inflammation = pinkeye.*

Conjunctivitis

con · junc · ti · vi · tis kon-junk-tih-VY-tis

Inflammation of the conjunctiva — 'pinkeye.' Causes redness, discharge, and irritation. Can be bacterial (treated with antibiotics), viral, or allergic.

💡 *Conjunctiva + 'itis' (inflammation) = pinkeye. This is one of the easiest medical terms to remember because everyone knows 'pinkeye'! Bacterial = yellow/green discharge + treatable. Viral = watery discharge + contagious. Allergic = itchy.*

Cornea

cor · ne · a

KOR-nee-uh

The clear, dome-shaped outer covering of the front of the eye that focuses incoming light. The most powerful refracting (light-bending) structure in the eye. Has no blood vessels.

💡 *From Latin 'cornu' = horn (like a horn's hard, clear tip). The cornea is the clear 'horn' of the eye. If scratched: 'corneal abrasion.' LASER surgery (LASIK) reshapes the cornea to correct vision. Think: CORNEa = the eye's CORNER shield.*

Corneal abrasion

cor · ne · al a · bra · sion

KOR-nee-ul uh-BRAY-zhun

A scratch or scrape on the cornea, often caused by a foreign body, contact lens, or fingernail. Causes pain, tearing, and light sensitivity. Heals rapidly with treatment.

💡 *'Abrasion' = scrape/scratch (Latin 'abrasum' = scrape off). Same root: 'abrasive' (scratchy sandpaper). Corneal + abrasion = a scratch on the clear front of the eye. Never rub a potentially scratched eye — it worsens the abrasion.*

Diabetic retinopathy

di · a · bet · ic ret · i · nop · a · thy dy-uh-BET- ik ret-ih-NOP-uh-thee

Damage to the blood vessels of the retina caused by long-term high blood sugar in diabetes. Leading cause of blindness in working-age adults. Early stages have no symptoms.

💡 *'Retino' (retina) + 'pathy' (disease). '-pathy' = disease/suffering. Many medical terms end in '-pathy': neuropathy (nerve disease), cardiomyopathy (heart muscle disease). Diabetic retinopathy = diabetes + retina + disease.*

Diplopia

di · plo · pi · a dih-PLOH-pee-uh

Double vision — seeing two images of a single object. Caused by misalignment of the eyes or neuromuscular problems affecting eye movement.

💡 *'Diplo' = double (Greek — like 'diploma' = two layers of learning). 'Opia' = vision. Diplopia = double vision. Compare: 'mono' (one), 'diplo' (two). Monopia would be one-eye vision. A 'diploma' has your name twice because it was originally folded.*

Ectropion

ec · tro · pi · on ek-TROH-pee-on

Outward turning of the eyelid margin, usually the lower lid, causing the inner surface to be exposed. Leads to dryness, irritation, and excessive tearing.

💡 *'Ecto' = out/outside (Greek) + 'tropion' = turning. ECTropion = eyelid turning OUT. Compare ENTropion = eyelid turning IN ('ento' = inside/within). Memory: ECT-ropion = Exits outward; ENT-ropion = ENTers inward.*

Entropion

en · tro · pi · on en-TROH-pee-on

Inward turning of the eyelid margin, causing the eyelashes to rub against the cornea. Results in irritation, pain, and potential corneal damage. Common in elderly patients.

💡 *'Ento/endo' = in/inside + 'tropion' = turning. ENTropion = eyelid turning INWARD. The lashes scratch the eye — painful! Memory: ENTropion = ENTers inward (lashes enter into the eye). Compare ECTropion = exits outward.*

Eustachian tube

eu · sta · chi · an tube yoo-STAY-shun

A canal connecting the middle ear to the back of the throat (nasopharynx). Equalizes air pressure on both sides of the eardrum. When blocked (during a cold), ears feel 'full.'

💡 *Named after Bartolomeo Eustachi, an Italian anatomist (1500s). This is a PROPER NAME — no meaning to decode. Function memory: when you yawn or swallow and your ears 'pop' — that's the Eustachian tube opening to equalize pressure. Blocked tube = ear infection risk.*

Exophthalmos

ex · oph · thal · mos ek-sof-THAL-mos

Abnormal bulging or protrusion of the eyeball from the eye socket. Most commonly caused by hyperthyroidism (Graves' disease). Eyes appear to 'pop out.'

💡 *'Exo' = out/outside + 'ophthalmos' = eye (Greek). Eye going OUT. Compare 'exo-' in other words: exoskeleton (skeleton on the outside), exodus (going out). Graves' disease connection: an overactive thyroid causes tissue swelling behind the eye, pushing it forward.*

Fovea centralis retinae

fo · ve · a cen · tra · lis ret · i · nae

FOH- vee-uh sen-TRAY-lis RET-ih-nee

The small pit in the center of the macula lutea in the retina, containing the highest concentration of cones. The point of sharpest, most detailed vision (20/20 vision).

💡 'Fovea' = Latin for 'small pit.' 'Centralis' = central. 'Retinae' = of the retina. Literally: 'the central pit of the retina.' When you look directly AT something, that image falls on the fovea. It is your sharpest 'focus point.' Like a camera's focal point.

Fundus

fun · dus

FUN-dus

The interior back surface of the eye, visible through an ophthalmoscope. Contains the retina, optic disk, macula, and blood vessels. Examined in a fundoscopic exam.

💡 'Fundus' = Latin for 'bottom/base.' In anatomy, 'fundus' refers to the BASE of a hollow organ (fundus of the eye = back; fundus of the uterus = upper part). A fundoscopic exam looks at the BOTTOM/BACK of the eye using a bright light instrument.

Glaucoma

glau · co · ma glaw-KOH-muh

A group of eye conditions causing damage to the optic nerve, usually due to elevated intraocular pressure. The leading cause of irreversible blindness worldwide. Often has no early symptoms.

💡 'Glaukos' = gray-green in Greek — describing the hazy, grayish appearance of the eye in advanced glaucoma. It is 'the silent thief of sight' because damage is painless and gradual. Early detection through eye pressure testing is key.

Hearing loss

hear · ing loss

HEER-ing lawss

Reduction in the ability to perceive sound, ranging from mild to profound deafness. Can be conductive (outer/middle ear), sensorineural (inner ear/nerve), or mixed.

💡 Two types: CONDUCTIVE = sound can't get through (wax, fluid, damage) — like a blocked pipe. SENSORINEURAL = nerve/inner ear damage — like a broken receiver. 'Sensori' = senses + 'neural' = nerve. Conductive can often be fixed; sensorineural is usually permanent.

Hordeolum

hor · de · o · lum hor-DEE-oh-lum

A stye — a painful, red bump on the eyelid caused by a blocked and infected oil gland (Meibomian gland) at the base of an eyelash. Usually resolves with warm compresses.

💡 From Latin 'hordeum' = barley grain — because a stye looks like a small barley grain on the eyelid! Medical name for a very common condition. Memory: 'Hor-de-olum' = a 'HORRIBLE LITTLE' bump on your eyelid. Most people call it a 'stye.'

Hyperopia

hy · per · o · pi · a hy-per-OH-pee-uh

Farsightedness — difficulty seeing nearby objects clearly while distant objects are relatively clear. Caused by the eyeball being too short or the cornea having too little curve.

💡 *'Hyper' = over/beyond + 'opia' = vision. You can see BEYOND (far) but not close. 'Hyper' is a common prefix: hyperactive, hypertension, hyperglycemia. Hyperopia = vision that works at 'hyper' (far) distance. Contrast: MYopia = MYopic about NEARBY things.*

Hypertensive retinopathy

hy · per · ten · sive ret · i · nop · a · thy hy-per-TEN-siv ret-ih-NOP-uh-thee

Damage to the retinal blood vessels caused by chronic high blood pressure. Signs seen on fundoscopic exam include narrowed arteries, hemorrhages, and optic disc swelling.

💡 *'Hyper' (high) + 'tensive' (tension/pressure) + 'retino' (retina) + 'pathy' (disease). High blood pressure damages the tiny retinal vessels. Another reason to control blood pressure — it silently damages not just the heart and kidneys but also the eyes!*

Impacted cerumen

im · pact · ed ce · ru · men im-PAK-ted seh-ROO-

men Earwax that has become tightly packed in the ear canal, blocking sound transmission and causing hearing loss, pain, or tinnitus. Treated by irrigation or manual removal.

💡 *'Impacted' = stuck/wedged in. You already know: impacted wisdom tooth (stuck tooth). Same concept — impacted cerumen is earwax stuck in the canal. 'Cerumen' = earwax (from Latin 'cera' = wax). Treatment: ear irrigation (flushing with water).*

Incus

in · cus

ING-kus

The middle of the three tiny ossicles (bones) in the middle ear, shaped like an anvil. Transmits vibrations from the malleus to the stapes. The 'anvil' bone.

💡 *'Incus' = Latin for 'anvil' (the metal block a blacksmith hammers on). The three ossicles are named for their shapes: Malleus (hammer), Incus (anvil), Stapes (stirrup). Together: HAS — Hammer, Anvil, Stirrup. The tiniest bones in the human body!*

Insufflation

in · suf · fla · tion in-suf-LAY-shun

The act of blowing air, gas, or powder into a body cavity. In otoscopy, a pneumatic otoscope uses insufflation to test eardrum mobility.

💡 *'In' (into) + 'sufflation' from Latin 'sufflare' = to blow. To INFLATE = blow up; to INSUFFLATE = blow INTO a cavity. Related: 'insufflate,' 'inflate,' 'exsufflate.' In ear exams: the doctor gently blows air at the eardrum to check if it moves normally.*

Labyrinth

lab · y · rinth

LAB-ih-rinth

The complex system of bony and membranous tunnels in the inner ear containing the cochlea (hearing) and semicircular canals/vestibule (balance). Labyrinthitis = inflammation causing vertigo.

💡 A 'labyrinth' is a maze — and the inner ear IS a maze of tunnels! Greek mythology: the Minotaur lived in the Labyrinth. The inner ear's complexity resembles a maze. This is a word most students already know from the myth or fantasy stories.

Lacrimal apparatus

lac · ri · mal ap · pa · ra · tus

LAK-rih-mul ap-uh-

RAY-tus The complete tear-producing and tear-draining system: lacrimal gland (produces tears) → lacrimal sac → nasolacrimal duct (drains tears into the nose).

💡 'Lacrima' = Latin for 'tear.' This is why crying is called 'lacrimation.' The lacrimal apparatus is the full system that makes AND drains tears. When you cry, tears drain into your nose via the nasolacrimal duct — that's why your nose runs when you cry!

Lacrimal gland

lac · ri · mal gland

LAK-rih-mul gland

The almond-shaped gland located in the upper outer corner of each eye socket that produces tears (lacrimal fluid) to moisten and protect the eye surface.

💡 'Lacrima' = tear. The lacrimal gland is the TEAR FACTORY. Located upper-outer corner — you can feel its position when you press gently on your eyebrow's outer edge. Tears flow ACROSS the eye and drain at the INNER corner (medial canthus).

Lacrimal sac

lac · ri · mal sac

LAK-rih-mul sak

A small sac at the inner corner of the eye that collects tears from the lacrimal canaliculi before they drain into the nasolacrimal duct and into the nose.

💡 'Sac' = bag/pouch (same in French). The lacrimal sac is the 'tear bag' — a collection point before tears drain away. Located at the inner corner of the eye (medial canthus). Dacryocystitis = infection of the lacrimal sac.

Macula lutea

mac · u · la lu · te · a

MAK-yoo-luh LOO-tee-uh

A small, yellowish oval area near the center of the retina with the highest concentration of cones and the fovea centralis at its center. Responsible for sharp central vision.

💡 'Macula' = spot (Latin) + 'lutea' = yellow (Latin). Literally 'yellow spot.' The macula is slightly yellow due to carotenoid pigments. Macular degeneration = the yellow spot deteriorates with age, destroying central sharp vision. Macula = where you see the most clearly.

Macular degeneration

mac · u · lar de · gen · er · a · tion

MAK-yoo-lar deh-jen-er-AY-shun

A progressive deterioration of the macula causing loss of sharp central vision. The leading cause of vision loss in people over 50. Does NOT affect peripheral vision.

💡 'Degener-ation' = de (down/away) + generate (create) = losing what was built. The macula 'de-generates' — breaks down. You can still see around the edges (peripheral) but central vision blurs. Like a hole in the middle of your visual field.

Malleus

mal · le · us

MAL-ee-us

The first and largest of the three ossicles in the middle ear, shaped like a hammer. Attached to the eardrum (tympanic membrane) and transmits vibrations to the incus.

💡 'Malleus' = Latin for 'hammer.' Hammer → Anvil (incus) → Stirrup (stapes). HAS: Hammer, Anvil, Stirrup. The malleus is attached to the eardrum — when sound makes the eardrum vibrate, the malleus vibrates first, like a hammer striking.

Ménière's disease

Mé · nière's dis · ease men-YAIRZ

A disorder of the inner ear causing recurring episodes of vertigo (spinning sensation), fluctuating hearing loss, tinnitus, and a feeling of fullness in the ear. Caused by abnormal fluid buildup in the inner ear.

💡 Named after French physician Prosper Ménière (1861). As a proper name, focus on pronunciation: men-YAIRZ (French). The disease causes 4 symptoms — VHFT: Vertigo, Hearing loss, Fullness, Tinnitus. The inner ear has too much fluid — like a flooded labyrinth.

Myopia

my · o · pi · a my-OH-pee-uh

Nearsightedness — difficulty seeing distant objects clearly while close objects are relatively clear. Caused by the eyeball being too long or the cornea having too much curve.

💡 'Myo' = to close/shut (Greek 'myein' = to close eyes). Nearsighted people squint/close their eyes to see far. 'Opia' = vision. Myopia = closing-your-eyes vision (squinting to see far). In Spanish: miopía. The most common refractive error worldwide.

Nasolacrimal duct

na · so · lac · ri · mal duct nay-zo-LAK-rih-mul dukt

The canal that drains tears from the lacrimal sac into the nasal cavity (inferior meatus). That's why crying makes your nose run — tears drain directly into the nose.

💡 'Naso' = nose (Latin 'nasus') + 'lacrimal' = tear + 'duct' = tube/canal. Literally: 'nose-tear tube.' Tears → lacrimal sac → nasolacrimal duct → nose. Blocked nasolacrimal duct in newborns is common — causes constant tearing from one eye.

Nyctalopia

nyc · ta · lo · pi · a nik-tuh-LOH-pee-uh

Night blindness — poor vision in dim light or darkness, caused by vitamin A deficiency (which impairs rhodopsin production in rods) or retinal disease.

💡 *'Nyct' = night (Greek 'nyx/nyktos') + 'opia' = vision. Vision that fails at NIGHT. Related: 'nocturnal' (Latin, same night concept). Vitamin A deficiency = night blindness because rods (night vision receptors) need vitamin A to make rhodopsin. Think: NYCTalopIA = NYCTurnal (night) vision failure.*

Nystagmus

nys · tag · mus nih-STAG-mus

Involuntary, rapid, rhythmic eye movements — the eyes repeatedly jerk back and forth, up and down, or rotationally. Can be horizontal, vertical, or rotary. May indicate inner ear or neurological problems.

💡 *From Greek 'nystagmos' = drowsiness/nodding. The eye movements resemble a drowsy person's head nodding. A way to test for nystagmus: watch someone's eyes as they follow a moving finger. Abnormal nystagmus = the eyes 'jerk' instead of smoothly tracking.*

Optic disk

op · tic disk

OP-tik disk

The point on the retina where the optic nerve fibers exit the eye. Also called the 'blind spot' because there are no photoreceptors here. Visible as a pale disc on fundoscopic exam.

💡 *'Optic' = relating to vision/eye (Greek 'optikos') + 'disk' = flat circular area. The optic disk IS the blind spot — no rods or cones there, so you technically cannot see objects that fall on this exact point. You don't notice it because your brain fills in the gap.*

Optic nerve

op · tic nerve

OP-tik nerv

Cranial nerve II — transmits visual information from the retina to the brain. Contains over 1 million nerve fibers. Damage is irreversible and is the mechanism of vision loss in glaucoma.

💡 *'Optic' = vision (Greek). The optic nerve is the 'cable' connecting the eye-camera to the brain-computer. Once damaged (by glaucoma, trauma), it cannot regenerate. This is why early detection of glaucoma is critical.*

Orbit

or · bit

OR-bit

The bony socket (cavity) of the skull that houses and protects the eyeball, along with fat, muscles, nerves, and blood vessels. Formed by 7 bones of the skull.

💡 You already know 'orbit' from space: a planet orbits (goes around) the sun. The eye socket = orbit because it is a round cavity that 'surrounds' the eye. Same word, different context. The eye literally sits inside an orbital cavity.

Ossicles

os · si · cles

OS-ih-kulz

The three smallest bones in the human body in the middle ear: malleus (hammer), incus (anvil), and stapes (stirrup). They amplify and transmit sound vibrations from the eardrum to the inner ear.

💡 'Ossi' = bone (Latin 'os/ossis') + '-cle' = small. Ossicles = tiny bones. Compare: ossification (bone formation), osseous (bony), osteoporosis (bone disease — 'osteo' = bone in Greek). HAS: Hammer, Anvil, Stirrup — the world's smallest bones!

Otitis media

o · ti · tis me · di · a oh-TY-tis

MEE-dee-uh

Middle ear infection — inflammation of the middle ear, usually caused by bacteria or viruses, often following a respiratory infection. Very common in children. Causes pain, fever, and hearing loss.

💡 'Oto' = ear (Greek 'ous/otos') + 'itis' = inflammation + 'media' = middle. Middle ear inflammation. 'Oto' root: otoscope (ear viewer), otolaryngology (ear-nose-throat specialty). Memory connection: many cultures say 'ear infection' — this is the medical term for MIDDLE ear infection.

Otosclerosis

o · to · scler · ro · sis oh-toh-skleh-ROH-sis

Abnormal bone growth in the middle ear that causes progressive conductive hearing loss by fixing the stapes in place, preventing it from vibrating. Treated with surgery (stapedectomy) or hearing aids.

💡 'Oto' (ear) + 'sclerosis' (hardening — Greek 'skleros' = hard). Hardening in the ear = bone growing abnormally, fixing the stapes. Compare: multiple sclerosis (hardening of nerve sheaths), arteriosclerosis (hardening of arteries). '-Sclerosis' = hardening.

Palpebrae

pal · pe · brae

PAL-peh-bree

The eyelids — the thin folds of skin that cover and protect the eyes. 'Palpebra' (singular); 'palpebrae' (plural). Upper palpebra and lower palpebra.

💡 'Palpebra' = Latin for eyelid. 'Palpebral' = relating to the eyelids (adjective). Palpebral fissure = the opening between the eyelids. Palpebrae = the EYELIDS themselves. Latin medical terms often just need to be memorized — but the word 'blink' comes from Dutch, while the medical term comes from Latin.

Palpebral fissure

pal · pe · bral fis · sure

PAL-peh-brul FISH-ur

The opening (gap) between the upper and lower eyelids — the visible part of the eye. Narrowed in blepharoptosis (drooping) or Horner's syndrome.

💡 *'Palpebral' = relating to eyelids + 'fissure' = a crack/opening. A 'fissure' is a narrow opening — like a crack in the earth (geological fissure) or a crack in rock. The palpebral fissure is the 'crack' between your eyelids through which you see the world.*

Papilledema

pa · pil · le · de · ma pap-il-eh-DEE-muh

Swelling of the optic disc (the point where the optic nerve enters the eye) due to increased intracranial pressure. A serious sign visible on fundoscopic exam, indicating pressure inside the skull.

💡 *'Papilla' = small rounded elevation (Latin — like a nipple shape) + 'edema' = swelling. The optic papilla/disc is swollen. Edema = fluid swelling (you may know: edema = swollen feet/ankles). Papilledema = swelling of the optic disc due to pressure — a medical emergency sign.*

Photophobia

pho · to · pho · bi · a foh-toh-FOH-bee-uh

Abnormal sensitivity to or intolerance of light — light causes eye pain or discomfort. Common in migraine, meningitis, corneal abrasion, or severe conjunctivitis.

💡 *'Photo' = light (Greek 'phos/photos') + 'phobia' = fear/intolerance. Light- fear/sensitivity. You know 'photography' (writing with light), 'phobia' (fear — arachnophobia, claustrophobia). Photophobia = the eye FEARS/rejects bright light. Common during migraines.*

Presbycusis

pres · by · cu · sis prez-bih-KYOO-sis

Age-related hearing loss — the gradual, progressive loss of hearing that occurs with aging, affecting high-frequency sounds first. The most common cause of hearing loss in older adults.

💡 *'Presby' = old man (Greek 'presbys') + 'cusis' = hearing (Greek). Compare 'presbyopia' (age-related vision loss). 'Presby' = aging: Presbyterian church = 'governed by elders.' Presbycusis = old-age hearing loss. Presbyopia = old-age vision loss. Same prefix, two senses.*

Presbyopia

pres · by · o · pi · a prez-bee-OH-pee-uh

Age-related farsightedness caused by loss of elasticity of the lens, making it difficult to focus on near objects. Almost everyone over age 45 develops it. Reading glasses are the typical treatment.

💡 *'Presby' (old age) + 'opia' (vision). Age-related near vision loss. Compare to PRESBYCUSIS (age-related hearing loss). The lens stiffens with age like old rubber bands. Reading glasses for people 'of a certain age' are treating presbyopia. Very common — many students' parents or grandparents have this!*

Pupil

pu · pil

PYOO-pul

The dark circular opening in the center of the iris that allows light to enter the eye. Dilates in dim light and constricts in bright light (pupillary light reflex).

💡 *In Latin, 'pupilla' = little doll — because when you look into someone's eye, you see a tiny reflected image of yourself (like a little doll). Same word in English for 'student' (pupil). Pupils DILATE (get bigger) in dark; CONSTRICT (get smaller) in light. Remember: D = Dark = Dilate.*

Refraction

re · frac · tion reh-FRAK-shun

The bending of light rays as they pass from one medium (air) into the eye's refractive structures (cornea, lens). Refraction focuses light onto the retina for clear vision. Abnormal refraction = myopia, hyperopia, astigmatism.

💡 *'Re-fract' from Latin 'refrangere' = to break back. Light 'breaks' direction when entering a denser medium. Like a straw appearing 'broken' in a glass of water — that's refraction! A refractive error means light doesn't bend correctly to focus on the retina.*

Retina

ret · i · na

RET-ih-nuh

The light-sensitive inner lining of the back of the eye containing rods and cones (photoreceptors) that convert light into nerve signals sent to the brain via the optic nerve.

💡 *From Latin 'rete' = net — the retina looks like a net of nerve fibers lining the back of the eye. 'Retinal' = relating to the retina. The retina is the film in the eye-camera. Without a retina, you cannot convert light into images the brain can process.*

Retinal detachment

ret · i · nal de · tach · ment

RET-ih-nul deh-TACH-

ment An emergency condition where the retina separates from the back wall of the eye, cutting off its blood supply. Warning signs: sudden floaters, flashes of light, or a 'curtain' falling across vision. Requires urgent surgery.

💡 *'Detachment' = separating from what it was attached to. Retinal detachment = the retina peels away from the eye wall. A medical emergency — like wallpaper peeling off a wall. Warning: sudden 'curtain' across vision → call 911! Time is critical for saving vision.*

Sclera

scler · ra

SKLAIR-uh

The tough, white, fibrous outer layer of the eyeball — the 'white of the eye.' Provides structural support and protection. The cornea is a transparent portion of the sclera in front.

💡 *'Skleros' = hard (Greek). The sclera is the hard, protective coat of the eye. Related: 'sclerosis' = hardening (multiple sclerosis, otosclerosis). Yellow sclera (icteric sclera) = jaundice (liver disease). Normal sclera = white. Think: sclera = the EYE's SHELL.*

Semicircular canals

sem · i · cir · cu · lar ca · nals sem-ee-SER-kyoo- lar kuh-NALZ

Three fluid-filled loops in the inner ear oriented at right angles to each other, responsible for detecting rotational head movements and maintaining balance/equilibrium.

💡 *'Semi' = half + 'circular' = circle-shaped. They are HALF-circles (loops). Three loops in 3 different directions — like the X, Y, Z axes in math — detect rotation in any direction. When you spin and feel dizzy, your semicircular canals detected too much rotation!*

Stapes

sta · pes

STAY-peeZ

The third and smallest ossicle in the middle ear, shaped like a stirrup. Transmits vibrations from the incus to the oval window of the inner ear. The smallest bone in the human body.

💡 *'Stapes' = Latin for 'stirrup' (the foot support on a saddle). The stapes is shaped exactly like a horse-riding stirrup! HAS: Hammer (malleus), Anvil (incus), Stirrup (stapes). The stapes is the LAST bone before the inner ear — the final messenger of sound.*

Strabismus

stra · bis · mus struh-BIZ-mus

Misalignment of the eyes (crossed eyes or wall-eyes) where the eyes don't point at the same object simultaneously. Can be constant or intermittent. Types: esotropia (inward) or exotropia (outward).

💡 *From Greek 'strabismos' = squinting. The eye 'strays' from the correct alignment. Easy association: if you've ever noticed a person whose eye 'wanders' or is 'crossed' — that is strabismus. Esotropia = eyes turn IN (toward each other). Exotropia = eyes turn OUT.*

Tinnitus

tin · ni · tus

TIN-ih-tus OR tih-NY-tus

A ringing, buzzing, humming, or other sound in the ears or head that has no external source. Can be caused by noise exposure, earwax, medications, or hearing loss.

💡 *From Latin 'tinnire' = to ring/jingle. 'Tintin' in French comic books gets his name from the same root (ringing sound). Tinnitus = ringing in the ears. Note: TWO accepted pronunciations — both TIN-ih-tus and tih-NY-tus are correct. The ringing you hear after a loud concert = tinnitus.*

Tympanic membrane

tym · pan · ic mem · brane tim-PAN-ik

MEM-

The eardrum — a thin, cone-shaped membrane that vibrates in response to sound waves, transmitting vibrations to the malleus and the rest of the middle ear ossicles.

💡 *'Tympanic' = from Greek 'tympanon' = drum. 'Membrane' = thin skin/film. The eardrum IS a drum — it vibrates when sound hits it, like a drum skin. 'Tympanic' appears in: tympanometry (ear drum test), tympanoplasty (drum repair surgery). Your EAR-DRUM is literally named for a drum!*

Vestibule

ves · ti · bule

VES-tih-byool

The central cavity of the bony labyrinth of the inner ear. Contains the utricle and saccule, which detect linear acceleration and gravity. A key component of the balance system.

💡 In everyday English, a 'vestibule' is an entrance hall/lobby. In anatomy, it is the 'entrance' to the inner ear — the central space connecting the cochlea and semicircular canals. Your body's vestibular system = your balance system. 'Vestibular disorder' = balance problem.

Vitreous chamber

vit · re · ous cham · ber

VIT-ree-us CHAYM-ber

The large posterior cavity of the eye (behind the lens) filled with vitreous humor — a clear, gel-like substance that maintains eye shape and holds the retina in place.

💡 'Vitreous' from Latin 'vitreus' = glass/glassy. The vitreous humor is clear and glass-like. Compare: 'vitro' in 'in vitro fertilization' (in glass). AQUEOUS = watery (front of eye); VITREOUS = glassy gel (back of eye). Remember: Aqua = water = FRONT; Vitreo = glass/gel = BACK.

Vitreous humor

vit · re · ous hu · mor

VIT-ree-us HYOO-mor

The clear, gel-like substance filling the vitreous chamber (the large space behind the lens). Maintains the spherical shape of the eye and holds the retina in place. Unlike aqueous humor, vitreous humor is not continuously replaced.

💡 'Vitreous' (glassy) + 'humor' (fluid). The vitreous is a PERMANENT gel — you are born with it and it is never fully replaced. With age, it liquefies and shrinks, causing 'floaters' (dark specks in vision). If the vitreous pulls on the retina = retinal tear/detachment risk.