

# Medical Terminology

## Flashcard Study Guide

### Chapter 26: Respiratory System

45 terms

Each card contains:


**Term** | Syllables | *Pronunciation* | Definition |  *Memory trick*

## Chapter 26 — Respiratory System

### Alveoli

al · ve · o · li *al-VEE-oh-lye*

Tiny air sacs at the ends of the bronchioles in the lungs where gas exchange occurs. Oxygen passes into the blood and carbon dioxide passes out through the thin alveolar walls.

 *Think 'alveoli = air vaults' — they are the small vaults in the lungs where oxygen and CO2 are exchanged.*

### Apnea

ap · ne · a *AP-nee-uh*

The temporary cessation of breathing. It can occur during sleep (sleep apnea) or as a result of injury or illness.

 *'A' = without, 'pnea' = breathing. No breathing = apnea. Like 'a' (absent) breath.*

### Arterial blood gases (ABGs)

ar · te · ri · al blood gas · es *ar-TEER-ee-ul blud GAS-ez*

A blood test measuring oxygen, carbon dioxide, and pH levels in arterial blood. ABGs assess lung function and acid-base balance.

 *ABGs = 'A Blood Gas snapshot' — they show how well the lungs are exchanging gases in the arteries.*

### Asphyxia

as · phyx · i · a *as-FIK-see-uh*


A condition caused by a lack of oxygen reaching the body's tissues, often due to blocked airways. It can lead to unconsciousness and death if not quickly corrected.

 *Think 'suffocation' — asphyxia is the medical term for being deprived of oxygen.*

### Asthma

asth · ma *AZ-muh*

A chronic inflammatory disease of the airways causing episodes of wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness, and coughing. Triggered by allergens, exercise, or irritants.

 *Think of someone gasping — asthma makes the airways narrow so breathing becomes a 'wheeze and squeeze.'*

## Bronchi

bron · chi *BRON-kye*

The two main airway branches that arise from the trachea and lead into each lung. They further divide into smaller bronchioles.

💡 *'Bronchi' sounds like 'branches' — they are the branching airways off the main trunk (trachea).*

## Bronchitis

bron · chi · tis *bron-KYE-tis*

Inflammation of the bronchial tubes, causing cough with mucus production. Can be acute (short-term, often from infection) or chronic (long-term, often from smoking).

💡 *'Bronch' (airways) + 'itis' (inflammation) = inflamed airways. Coughing is the classic sign.*

## Bronchodilators

bron · cho · di · la · tors *bron-koh-DYE-lay-torz*

Medications that relax and widen the bronchial tubes, making breathing easier. Commonly used via inhaler for asthma and COPD.

💡 *'Broncho' = airways + 'dilate' = widen. They dilate (open up) the bronchi so air flows freely.*

## Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>)

car · bon di · ox · ide *KAR-bon dy-OK-syde*

A colorless, odorless gas produced by the body's cells as a waste product of metabolism. Exhaled through the lungs during respiration.

💡 *CO<sub>2</sub> = the waste gas you breathe OUT. Think of fizzy drinks — the bubbles are CO<sub>2</sub> escaping.*

## Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

chron · ic ob · struc · tive pul · mo · nar · y dis · ease *KRON-ik ob-STRUK-tiv PUL-moh-nair-ee dih-ZEEZ*

A group of progressive lung diseases, primarily emphysema and chronic bronchitis, that obstruct airflow. Most commonly caused by long-term smoking.

💡 *COPD = Constantly Obstructed Pulmonary Disease. The airways are permanently blocked and getting worse.*

## Cilia

cil · i · a *SIL-ee-uh*

Tiny hair-like structures lining the respiratory tract that sweep mucus, dust, and pathogens away from the lungs. They protect the airways from infection.

💡 *Think of tiny brooms sweeping the airways clean — cilia are the lungs' cleaning crew.*

## Common cold

com · mon cold *KOM-un kold*

A viral infection of the upper respiratory tract, most often caused by rhinoviruses. Symptoms include runny nose, sneezing, sore throat, and mild fever.

💡 *The most common respiratory illness — everyone has had it. Rhinovirus = 'rhino' (nose) virus.*

## Cyanosis

cy · a · no · sis *sy-uh-NOH-sis*

A bluish discoloration of the skin, lips, or fingernails caused by insufficient oxygen in the blood. A sign of serious respiratory or cardiac compromise.

💡 *'Cyan' = blue-green color. Cyanosis = the patient turns blue from lack of oxygen.*

## Diaphragm

di · a · phragm *DYE-uh-fragm*

The dome-shaped muscle below the lungs that is the primary muscle of breathing. It contracts and flattens during inhalation, expanding the chest cavity.

💡 *The diaphragm is like a pump — when it drops down, it pulls air in like a piston.*

## Dyspnea

dysp · ne · a *DISP-nee-uh*

Difficulty or labored breathing; shortness of breath. A common symptom of respiratory and cardiac conditions.

💡 *'Dys' = difficult + 'pnea' = breathing. Dyspnea = difficult breathing. Dys = DYSfunction of breathing.*

## Emphysema

em · phy · se · ma *em-fih-SEE-muh*

A chronic lung disease where the alveoli are damaged and lose their elasticity, trapping air in the lungs. Results in progressive shortness of breath.

💡 *Think of over-inflated balloons that lose their stretch — emphysema destroys the alveoli so they can't recoil.*

## Epiglottis

ep · i · glot · tis *ep-ih-GLOT-is*

A flap of cartilage at the base of the tongue that covers the trachea (windpipe) during swallowing to prevent food from entering the airway.

💡 *The epiglottis is the airway's 'trap door' — it slams shut when you swallow so food goes to the stomach, not lungs.*

## Expiration

ex · pi · ra · tion *eks-pih-RAY-shun*

The process of breathing out; the exhalation of air from the lungs. Normally a passive process that occurs when the diaphragm relaxes.

💡 *'Ex' = out. Expiration = air going out (like expiration date = something going out of use).*

## Hay fever

hay fe · ver *hay FEE-ver*

Allergic rhinitis — an allergic reaction to airborne allergens (pollen, mold, dust) causing sneezing, runny nose, and itchy eyes. Despite the name, no fever occurs.

💡 *Named for symptoms occurring during hay season — but it has no fever! Think of it as 'seasonal sneezing.'*

## Hemoptysis

he · mop · ty · sis *hee-MOP-tih-sis*

The coughing up of blood or blood-streaked mucus from the respiratory tract. May indicate serious conditions like tuberculosis, lung cancer, or pulmonary embolism.

💡 *'Hemo' = blood + 'ptysis' = spitting. Hemoptysis = spitting blood from the lungs. A serious warning sign.*

## Hila

hi · la *HYE-luh*

The plural of hilum — the gateway regions of each lung where bronchi, blood vessels, lymphatics, and nerves enter and exit. Visible on chest X-rays.

💡 *Think of hila as the 'hubs' of the lungs — the entry and exit point for everything going in and out.*

## Influenza

in · flu · en · za *in-floo-EN-zuh*

A highly contagious viral respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Symptoms include sudden fever, chills, muscle aches, fatigue, and respiratory symptoms.

💡 *'Flu' is short for influenza. The Italians named it after 'influence of the stars' — they thought celestial bodies caused it.*

## Inspiration

in · spi · ra · tion *in-spih-RAY-shun*

The process of breathing in; the inhalation of air into the lungs. An active process that requires contraction of the diaphragm and intercostal muscles.

💡 *'In' = into. Inspiration = breathing IN. It takes effort — the diaphragm actively pulls air in.*

## Larynx

lar · ynx *LAIR-inks*

The voice box — a cartilaginous structure in the throat that contains the vocal cords. It connects the pharynx to the trachea and produces sound.

💡 *The larynx = 'lark' box. Larks are singing birds — the larynx is the singing organ of the body.*

## Legionnaires' disease

Le · gion · naires' dis · ease *lee-zhun-AIRZ dih-ZEEZ*

A severe form of pneumonia caused by Legionella bacteria, often spread through contaminated water systems. Named after a 1976 outbreak at an American Legion convention.

💡 *Named after the 1976 American Legion convention outbreak. Think 'Legion + airs' — spread through the air from water systems.*

## Lung cancer

lung can · cer *lung KAN-ser*

Malignant tumors in the lung tissue, most commonly caused by smoking. The leading cause of cancer death; two main types are small cell and non-small cell lung cancer.

*💡 The #1 cancer killer — and mostly preventable. Linked strongly to smoking: cigarettes → carcinogens → lung cancer.*

## Lungs

lungs *lungz*

The pair of spongy, air-filled organs in the chest responsible for gas exchange. The right lung has three lobes; the left has two (to accommodate the heart).

*💡 Right lung = 3 lobes (more room), Left lung = 2 lobes (heart takes up space). Remember: Right = 3, Left = 2.*

## Nares

na · res *NAIR-eez*

The nostrils — the two external openings of the nasal cavity through which air enters and exits during breathing.

*💡 Nares = nostrils. Think 'nasal' — nares is the technical word for the holes in your nose.*

## Orthopnea

or · thop · ne · a *or-THOP-nee-uh*

Shortness of breath that occurs when lying flat and is relieved by sitting upright. A classic symptom of heart failure and severe asthma.

*💡 'Ortho' = straight/upright + 'pnea' = breathing. You can only breathe upright — must sit up to breathe.*

## Pertussis (whooping cough)

per · tus · sis *per-TUS-is*

A highly contagious bacterial respiratory infection causing severe coughing fits followed by a high-pitched 'whoop' sound during inspiration. Caused by *Bordetella pertussis*.

*💡 The 'whoop' in whooping cough = the sound of gasping for air after a coughing fit. Pertussis = persistent cough.*

## Pharynx

phar · ynx *FAIR-inks*

The throat — a muscular tube connecting the nasal and oral cavities to the larynx and esophagus. It serves as a common pathway for both air and food.

*💡 Pharynx = 'far-inks' — it's in the far back of your mouth. Food and air both pass through the pharynx.*

## Pleura

pleu · ra *PLOOR-uh*

A double-layered membrane surrounding each lung. The inner visceral layer covers the lung; the outer parietal layer lines the chest wall. Pleural fluid between them reduces friction.

💡 *Pleura = 'pleural wrapping' around the lungs. Like shrink wrap — two layers with slippery fluid between them.*

## Pleurisy

pleu · ri · sy *PLOOR-ih-see*

Inflammation of the pleura causing sharp chest pain that worsens with breathing, coughing, or movement. Usually caused by viral or bacterial infection.

💡 *Pleur + isy = inflamed pleura. The two layers rub against each other — like sandpaper, causing stabbing pain with each breath.*

## Pneumonia

pneu · mo · ni · a *noo-MOH-nee-uh*

An infection that inflames the air sacs (alveoli) in one or both lungs. Alveoli fill with fluid or pus, causing cough, fever, and difficulty breathing.

💡 *'Pneumo' = lung + 'nia' = condition. Pneumonia = lungs filled with fluid. The 'P' is silent — say 'noo-MOH-nee-uh.'*

## Pneumothorax

pneu · mo · tho · rax *noo-moh-THOR-aks*

Collapsed lung — air enters the space between the lung and chest wall (pleural space), causing the lung to collapse. Can be spontaneous or from trauma.

💡 *'Pneumo' = air + 'thorax' = chest. Air in the chest (where it shouldn't be) = collapsed lung.*

## Pulmonary edema

pul · mo · nar · y e · de · ma *PUL-moh-nair-ee eh-DEE-muh*

Fluid accumulation in the lungs, usually from heart failure, causing severe shortness of breath. The alveoli fill with fluid instead of air.

💡 *'Pulmonary' = lung + 'edema' = swelling/fluid. Lungs drowning in fluid — like a pool in your alveoli.*

## Pulmonary embolism (PE)

pul · mo · nar · y em · bo · lism *PUL-moh-nair-ee EM-boh-liz-um*

A blood clot (usually from a leg vein) that travels to and blocks a pulmonary artery, cutting off blood flow to part of the lung. A life-threatening emergency.

💡 *PE = Plugged artery in the lung. A clot breaks free, travels to the lung, and blocks blood flow — sudden, severe, serious.*

## Septum

sep · tum *SEP-tum*

A dividing wall of tissue. In the nose, the nasal septum divides the nasal cavity into two sides. A deviated septum can obstruct airflow.

💡 *'Sept' = wall/partition. The septum is the wall separating the two sides of your nose.*

## Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)

se · vere a · cute res · pi · ra · tor · y syn · drome *seh-VEER uh-KYOOT RES-pih-ruh-tor-ee SIN-drome*

A serious viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus (SARS-CoV), first identified in 2002. Causes fever, cough, and pneumonia-like symptoms with high mortality.

*💡 SARS = Severely Awful Respiratory Sickness. A coronavirus that caused a global outbreak in 2002-2003.*

## Sinuses

si · nus · es *SYE-nus-ez*

Air-filled cavities in the skull bones (frontal, maxillary, ethmoid, sphenoid) that are connected to the nasal passages. They lighten the skull and produce mucus.

*💡 Sinuses = air pockets in the skull. When inflamed, you feel pressure in your face — that's why sinus headaches hurt.*

## Sinusitis

si · nus · i · tis *sye-nuh-SYE-tis*

Inflammation or infection of the sinuses, causing nasal congestion, facial pain, headache, and thick nasal discharge. Can be acute or chronic.

*💡 Sinus + itis = inflamed sinuses. Pressure, pain, and congestion = classic sinusitis trio.*

## Tonsils

ton · sils *TON-sulz*

Masses of lymphatic tissue at the back of the throat (palatine tonsils) that act as the first line of immune defense against inhaled or ingested pathogens.

*💡 Tonsils = throat guards. They catch germs entering through the mouth and nose — your body's security checkpoint.*

## Trachea

tra · che · a *TRAY-kee-uh*

The windpipe — a rigid, cartilage-ringed tube that connects the larynx to the bronchi. It carries air to and from the lungs.

*💡 Trachea = the main air highway. The C-shaped cartilage rings keep it open like a garden hose that won't kink.*

## Tuberculosis

tu · ber · cu · lo · sis *too-ber-kyoo-LOH-sis*

A contagious bacterial infection caused by Mycobacterium tuberculosis, primarily affecting the lungs. Symptoms include chronic cough, night sweats, and weight loss.

*💡 TB = tiny bacteria that create tubercles (nodules) in the lung. 'Tuber' = lump/nodule + 'osis' = condition.*

## Visceral pleura

vis · cer · al pleu · ra *VIS-er-ul PLOOR-uh*

The inner layer of the pleura that directly covers the surface of the lung. It adheres to the lung and cannot be separated from it without damaging lung tissue.

*💡 'Visceral' = relating to the organs. The visceral pleura is the lung's own wrapping — it sticks directly to the lung.*