



Recommendations for  
**terminology, abbreviations  
and symbols** used in  
medicines documentation  
– Summary sheet

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# Recommendations for terminology, abbreviations and symbols used in medicines documentation – Summary sheet

## Principles for safe, clear and consistent terminology for medicines

1. Use plain English – avoid jargon.
2. Write all characters clearly and individually – especially when writing medicine names.
3. Write instructions and routes of administration in full.
4. Instructions must be clear.
5. Use generic medicine names (active ingredient or approved name).
6. Write medicine names in full – do not abbreviate any medicine name.
7. Write chemical names in full.
8. Do not include the salt of the chemical unless it is clinically significant.
9. Use National Tall Man Lettering for 'look-alike, sound-alike' medicines. (Not applicable to handwritten medicines documentation.)
10. Dose
  - Use words or Hindu-arabic numbers. Use 1,2,3 etc.
  - Do not use Roman numerals.
  - Use metric units.
  - Clearly separate different elements of the medicine order.
  - Use a leading zero in front of a decimal point for a dose less than 1.
  - Do not use trailing zeros.
  - Do not follow abbreviations such as 'mg' or 'mL' with a decimal point or full stop ('mg.' or 'mL.').
  - For oral liquid preparations, express dose in weight as well as volume.
  - Express dosage frequency unambiguously.
11. Use 24-hour time for time-of-day administration.
12. Avoid fractions.
13. Do not use symbols.
14. Avoid acronyms or abbreviations for medical terms and procedure names on orders or prescriptions.
15. Use words to express numbers of 1,000 or more. Otherwise use commas for dosing units at or above 1,000.

## List of safe terms, abbreviations and dose designations for medicines

The following tables list the terms and abbreviations that are commonly used and understood and therefore considered acceptable for use.

Safe terms and abbreviations should be written **exactly** as shown.

### Dose frequency or timing

Intended meaning	Safe terms or abbreviations
(in the) morning	morning, mane
(at) midday	midday
(at) night	night, nocte
twice a day	bd
three times a day	tds
four times a day	qid
every 4 hours	every 4 hrs, 4 hourly, 4 hrly
every 6 hours	every 6 hrs, 6 hourly, 6 hrly
every 8 hours	every 8 hrs, 8 hourly, 8 hrly
once a week	'once a week' and specify the day; e.g., 'once a week on Tues' (or Tuesdays)
three times a week	'three times a week' and specify the exact days, e.g., 'three times a week on Mon, Wed and Sat'
when required	prn
immediately	stat
before food	before food
after food	after food
with food	with food
< or >	less than, greater than
every two weeks, per fortnight	every two weeks
days of the week	Mon, Tues, Wed, Thurs, Fri, Sat, Sun
hourly, every hour	hourly, every hour
every two hours	every 2 hrs, every 2 hours
every 12 hours	every 12 hrs, every 12 hours
every second day, on alternate days	every 2 days
bedtime	bedtime

Intended meaning	Safe terms or abbreviations
once daily, once a day, daily, every day	'once a day' (preferably specifying the time of day), 'daily'
single dose	once
for one day only	for 1 day
for three days	for 3 days

### Routes of administration

Intended meaning	Safe terms or abbreviations
epidural	epidural
inhale, inhalation	inhale, inhalation
intraarticular	intraarticular
intramuscular	IM
intrathecal	intrathecal
intranasal	intranasal
intravenous	IV
irrigation	irrigation
left	left
nebulised	NEB
naso-gastric	NG
oral	PO
percutaneous enteral gastrostomy	PEG
per vagina	PV
per rectum	PR
peripherally inserted central catheter	PICC
right	right
subcutaneous	subcut

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Intended meaning	Safe terms or abbreviations
sublingual	subling, under the tongue
topical	topical
buccal	buccal
ear or eye (specify left, right or each)	(right/left/each) ear or eye
intraocular	intraocular
intradermal	intraocular
intraperitoneal	intraperitoneal
intraosseous	intraosseous

## Units of measure and concentration

Intended meaning	Safe terms or abbreviations
gram(s)	g
International unit(s)	unit(s)
unit(s)	unit(s)
litre(s)	L
milligram(s)	mg
millilitre(s)	mL
microgram(s)	microgram, MICROg, microg
percentage	%
millimole	mmol
milligram per litre	mg/L
metre	metre
microlitre, micromol	microlitre, micromol
kilogram	kg
hour, minute	hour, minute
centimetre, millimetre	cm, mm

## Dose forms

Intended meaning	Safe terms or abbreviations
capsule	capsule, cap
cream	cream
ear drops	ear drops
ear ointment	ear ointment, ear oint
eye drops	eye drops
eye ointment	eye ointment, eye oint
injection	injection, inj
metered dose inhaler	metered dose inhaler, inhaler, MDI
mixture	mixture
ointment	ointment, oint
pessary	pess
powder	powder
suppository	supp
tablet	tablet, tab
patient controlled analgesia	PCA
nebuliser	NEB

Australian Health Ministers endorsed the *Recommendations for Terminology, Abbreviations and Symbols used in the Prescribing and Administration of Medicines* in December 2008 for use in all Australian hospitals. It was prepared for, and is maintained by, the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care.

## AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

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