

Online medical dictionaries

Online dictionaries allow users to look up word definitions in seconds. Those dealing with medical terminology cover a host of topics, including pharmaceutical drugs, healthcare equipment, clinical conditions, and acronyms and abbreviations.

An Internet search for online medical dictionaries returned nine results and these are discussed below. The dictionaries vary in terms of style of presentation, acknowledgement of information sources, ownership and management (e.g. whether produced by government departments or commercial concerns), source of funding, and use of advertisements. Personal preference, as well as the type of information being sought, may influence the individual's choice of online medical dictionary. Some sites (e.g. TheFreeDictionary.com and monodfacto.com) deliver concise definitions in a clear, uncomplicated text box, while others (e.g. Med-Terms at MedicineNet.com) provide additional links to medical reference articles and other relevant health information websites. The distinguishing features of these online resources are described in alphabetical order.

Better Health Channel

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcsite.nsf/pages/bhc_medicaldictionary

This Australian website was established in May 1999 by the State Government of Victoria. It has no commercial advertising and does not accept corporate sponsorship. The Better Health Channel aims to provide health and medical information that is quality assured, reliable, up to date and easy to understand. The medical dictionary is provided by monodfacto (see below), and so the visitor is redirected to monodfacto.com when 'Search Medical Dictionary' is clicked. The medical acronyms and abbreviations are provided by mediLexicon (also see below). The site bears the HONcode certificate for trustworthy information.

Medic8

www.medic8.com/MedicalDictionary.htm

Although this resource is referred to as a medical dictionary, search results often take the form of

a page of links to reference articles rather than concise definitions. Medic8.com is a UK medical information website for healthcare professionals and consumers that calls itself 'your trusted source for health information online'. Four medical dictionaries available in print are recommended on the dictionary search page; however, there is no information on how this online dictionary has been compiled. The site is owned and run by Medic8 Ltd, a company registered in Scotland (company number 292442). The home page invites visitors to 'find a clinic/consultant' or 'get a free quote or advice'. As with every page on this site, links to Medic8 guides covering such topics as cosmetic surgery, hair transplant, laser eye surgery and weight loss surgery are featured down the right-hand menu on the dictionary page, while ads by Google are found on the left.

Medical Dictionary Online

www.online-medical-dictionary.org/

This site does not offer any information about the authors of its medical dictionary, although a prominent advertisement provides a link to a medical coding consultancy.

Medical Dictionary Web

www.medicaldictionaryweb.com

Medical Dictionary was created by Art Branch Inc., a web publishing company located in Toronto, Canada. Two of its other websites, whiteteeth.net and lowcarbfoods.org, have links from the Medical Dictionary page. There is no information about the compilation of this dictionary.

MediLexicon

www.medilexicon.com/medicaldictionary.php

MediLexicon International Ltd is an Internet publisher of health and medical news and information based in Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, UK. Their websites and services are free to use, being supported by advertising and educational grants from selected organizations. They aim to provide accurate, unbiased information via websites that are intuitive and easy to use, and

relevant information from sponsors is delivered in a unobtrusive fashion. You can search for medical dictionary definitions using either the search system or the alphabetical listing. An additional option is the 'fuzzy' search, which uses Google to provide variations on the results. This is made possible by 'fuzzy matching', in which the search engine returns results that it predicts will be relevant, even when the terms used in the query do not appear anywhere in the matched document. MediLexicon claims to have the world's largest online database of pharmaceutical and medical abbreviations. The information is copyright Lippincott Williams & Wilkins for *Stedman's Medical Dictionary*.

MedlinePlus

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/plusdictionary.html

This American medical dictionary is a service of MedlinePlus, the website of the US National Institutes of Health, produced by the US National Library of Medicine. The site claims to offer reliable health information that is updated daily. There is no advertising or product endorsement on this site, although the Merriam-Webster logo is next to the search box, which suggests that this dictionary is the source of the definitions. The resource is aimed at patients, their families and other consumers.

MedTerms

www.medterms.com/script/main/hp.asp

This is the medical dictionary provided by MedicineNet.com, which bears the HONcode certificate for trustworthy information. Medicine Net, Inc. is an online, healthcare media publishing company owned and operated by WebMD.com, and it is part of the WebMD network. It aims to provide easy-to-read, in-depth and authoritative medical information for consumers via a user-friendly and interactive website. Claiming to be accurate and authoritative yet still understandable, this online dictionary is compiled by the doctors and experts at WebMD.com, who are also the authors of the third edition of *Webster's New World Medical Dictionary*. The dictionary uses American English. The pages are very busy and feature a lot of advertisements. As well as the concise definition, where available, a search will bring up a list of related Medicine Net.com pages and links to other relevant websites.

Mondofacto

www.mondofacto.com/dictionary/medical.html

Mondofacto.com is the website of Mondofacto Ltd, an education company based in the UK that specializes in providing online learning and resources. This dictionary was originally developed by Dr Graham Dark, and it continues to be developed and expanded by a team of editors and content writers with a range of scientific and technical backgrounds. The dictionary is user-friendly and links to cross-referenced words within the definition. Mondofacto.com is included in a number of prestigious Internet resource collections such as the Intute database, a subject catalogue and search engine managed by various UK academic institutions, and the Internet Public Library's collection of authoritative and reliable material. All the content on mondofacto.com is currently free to access and the site is entirely funded through advertising revenue. Although subscription services are likely to be introduced in the future, access to the dictionaries and study skills topics will remain free of charge.

A special feature of the mondofacto dictionary is the 'word visualiser', a tool for exploring the meanings of words and the relationships between them. It can be used as a thesaurus of related and alternative words. The visualiser creates a network of 'synsets' from the search term entered. A synset is defined as a concept that is represented by a number of other terms or synonyms. Entering a search word or term brings up a diagram (see Fig. 1) that uses colour-coded spheres for the type of word (e.g. noun), while the links between words are represented by different types of lines that give information about how terms are related (e.g. hypernyms and hyponyms). A key explains the devices employed in the diagram. Double clicking on some of the interlinked terms will expand the diagram. The visualiser contains words from Princeton University's WordNet, an open source database. It is pointed out that although the word visualiser contains some medical terms, it is not as comprehensive a source of technical terminology as the mondofacto medical dictionary.

TheFreeDictionary

medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com

This medical dictionary is one of eight sections of a reference website that also offers a thesaurus, legal dictionary and acronym database. The site is owned by Farlex, Inc., an independent,

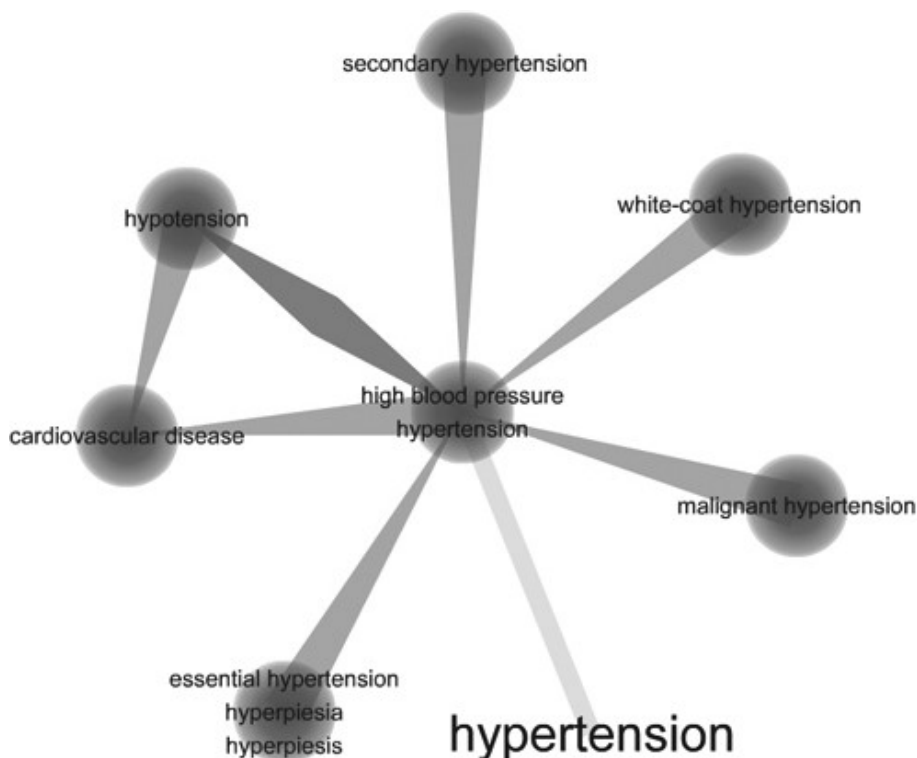


Figure 1. Example of a synset diagram.

privately owned company offering online reference products based in Huntingdon Valley, PA, USA.

The main sources of TheFreeDictionary's medical dictionary are quoted as being *The American Heritage Stedman's Medical Dictionary*, 2nd edn, *Dorland's Medical Dictionary for Health Care Consumers* and *The Gale Encyclopedia of Medicine*, 2nd edn. Additional source

materials include *Mosby's Dental Dictionary*, 2nd edn, *Mosby's Dictionary of Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, which catalogues terms used in non-conventional medical and healing practices, and *Saunders Comprehensive Veterinary Dictionary*, 3rd edn.

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