

Antipyretic

A type of drug that reduces fever. The most commonly used antipyretic drugs are aspirin and paracetamol.

Antiseptic

A chemical that destroys bacteria and sometimes other microorganisms. Antiseptics may be applied to the skin or other areas to prevent infection. See also Anti-infective skin preparations (p.135).

Antispasmodic

A drug that reduces spasm (abnormally strong or inappropriate contraction) of the digestive-tract muscles. The pain caused by intestinal spasm is known as colic. These drugs may be used to relieve irritable bowel syndrome (p.68).

Antitussive

A drug that prevents or relieves a cough. See also Drugs to treat coughs (p.52).

Aperient

A mild laxative. See Laxatives (p.69).

Astringent

A substance that causes tissue to dry and shrink by reducing its ability to absorb water. Astringents are used in a number of antiperspirants and skin tonics to remove excessive moisture from the skin surface. They are also used in ear drops for inflammation of the outer ear because they promote healing of inflamed tissue.

B**Bactericidal**

A term used to describe a drug that kills bacteria. See also Antibiotics (p.86) and Antibacterials (p.89).

Bacteriostatic

A term used to describe a drug that stops the growth or multiplication of bacteria. See also Antibiotics (p.86) and Antibacterials (p.89).

Balm

A soothing or healing preparation applied to the skin.

Bioavailability

The proportion of a dose of a drug that enters the bloodstream and so reaches the body tissues, usually expressed as a percentage of the dose given. Injection of a drug directly into a vein produces 100 per cent bioavailability. Drugs given by mouth generally have a lower bioavailability because some of the drug may not pass through the gut wall, and some may be broken down in the liver before reaching the rest of the body.

Blocker

See *Antagonist*.

Body mass index (BMI)

An indicator of healthy body weight. BMI is calculated by dividing a person's weight in kilograms by the square of his or her height in metres. The healthy range is 18.5–24.9.

Body salts

Also known as electrolytes, these are minerals that are present in body fluids such as blood, urine, and sweat, and within cells. These salts play an important role in regulating water balance, acidity of the blood, conduction of nerve impulses, and muscle contraction. The balance between the various salts can be upset by such conditions as diarrhoea and vomiting. The balance may also be altered by the action of drugs such as diuretics (p.57).

Brand name

The name chosen by a manufacturer for its version of a product containing a generic drug. For example, *Viagra* is a brand name for the generic drug *sildenafil*. See also *Generic name* and *How drugs are classified* (p.13).

Bronchoconstrictor

A substance that causes the airways in the lungs to narrow. An attack of asthma may be caused by the release of bronchoconstrictor substances such as histamine or certain prostaglandins.

Bronchodilator

A drug that widens the airways. See *Bronchodilators* (p.48).

C**Capsule**

See p.19.

Cathartic

A drug that stimulates bowel action to produce a soft or liquid bowel movement. See also *Laxatives* (p.69).

Chelating agent

A chemical used in the treatment of poisoning by metals such as iron, lead, arsenic, and mercury. It combines with the metal to form a less poisonous substance and in some cases increases excretion in the urine. *Penicillamine* is a commonly used chelating agent.

Chemotherapy

The drug treatment of cancer or infections. *Cytotoxic* drugs (see also p.112) and *antibiotics* (see also p.86) are examples of drugs used in chemotherapy.

Cholinergic

A drug, also called *parasympathomimetic*, that acts by stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system. See also *Autonomic nervous system* (p.35).

Coma

A state of unconsciousness and unresponsiveness to external stimuli such as noise and pain. Coma results from damage to or disturbance of part of the brain, for example by trauma or drug overdose.

Contraindication

A factor in a person's current condition, medical history, or genetic make-up that may increase the risks of an *adverse effect* from a drug, to the

extent that the drug should not be prescribed (called an absolute contraindication), or should only be prescribed with caution (called a relative contraindication).

Counter-irritant

Another term for *rubefacient*.

Cycloplegic

The action of paralysing the ciliary muscle in the eye. This muscle alters the shape of the lens when it contracts, enabling the eye to focus on objects. A cycloplegic drug prevents this action, thereby making both examination of, and surgery on, the eye easier. See also *Drugs affecting the pupil* (p.130).

Cytotoxic

A drug that kills or damages cells. Drugs with this action are most commonly used to treat cancer. Although these drugs are primarily intended to affect abnormal cells, they may also kill or damage healthy ones. See also *Anticancer drugs* (p.112).

D**Dependence**

A term that relates to psychological or physical dependence on a substance, or both. Psychological dependence involves intense mental cravings if a drug is unavailable or withdrawn. Physical dependence causes physical withdrawal symptoms (sweating, shaking, abdominal pain, and convulsions) if the substance is not taken. Dependence also implies loss of control over intake. See also *Drug dependence* (p.23).

Depot injection

Injection into a muscle of a drug that has been specially formulated to provide for a slow, steady absorption of its active ingredients by the surrounding blood vessels. The drug may be mixed with oil or wax. Alternatively, some drugs may be injected under the skin using an applicator. This is known as an implant injection. The release period can be made to last up to several weeks. See also *Methods of administration* (p.17).

Designer drugs

A group of unlicensed substances whose only purpose is to duplicate the effects of certain illegal drugs of abuse or to provide even stronger ones. Designer drugs differ chemically in some minor degree from the original drug, enabling the user and supplier to evade prosecution for dealing in, or possession of, an illegal drug. They are very dangerous because their effects are unpredictable, they are often highly potent, and they may contain impurities.

Double-blind

A test used to determine the effectiveness of a new drug compared to an existing medicine or a *placebo*. Neither patients nor the doctors administering the drug know who is receiving which substance. Only after the test is completed and the patients' responses