

## Latin abbreviations used in prescription writing

One of the major causes of medication errors is the ongoing use of potentially dangerous abbreviations and dose expressions. Latin was once the language of health care and its use made medical literature universally readable among educated people. Today English is the predominant language of medical literature yet, despite this, many health professionals continue to use Latin abbreviations.

Most of the abbreviations in the list below are provided for historical interest and teaching purposes only, as they are no longer used in prescription writing. However, some of them are still in common use. The New South Wales Therapeutic Advisory Group (TAG) has produced

a document entitled *Recommendations for Terminology, Abbreviations and Symbols used in the Prescribing and Administration of Medicines* that strongly recommends the use of plain English and the avoidance of abbreviations, including Latin abbreviations.<sup>1</sup> However, in recognition of the fact that certain abbreviations are still in use, it includes a list of the terms and abbreviations that are commonly used and understood and therefore considered acceptable for use. These appear in bold script in the table below.

Abbreviation	Latin	English
aa	ana	of each
ac	ante cibum	before food
ad		make up to
ad part dolent	partes dolentes	to the painful parts
ah	alternis horis	every other hour
altern d	alterno die	every other day
altern hor	alterno hora or alternis horis	every other hour
ap	ante prandium	before dinner
applic	applicandus	to be applied
	applicatio	an application
	applicetur, applicentur	let it, let them, be applied
aq	aqua	water
aq bull	aqua bulliens	boiling water
aq calid	aqua calida	warm or hot water
aq dest	aqua destillata	distilled water
aq ferv	aqua fervens	boiling water
aq gel	aqua gelida	cold water
aq pluv	aqua pluvialis	rain water
aur	auris	the ear
aur dextr (laev)	auris dextrae (laevae)	to right (left) ear
aurist	auristillae	ear drops
bid	bis in die	twice a day
<b>bd</b>	bis die	twice a day
brev	brevis	short
bull	bulliens	boiling
c	cum	with
calid	calidus	warm or hot
cap	capiat	let him take
cc	cum cibus	with food
cib	cibus	food
co	compositus	compound
coch	cochleare	spoonful
collut	collutorium	a mouthwash
collyr	collyrium	an eye lotion

Abbreviation	Latin	English
conspers	conspersus	a dusting powder
cort	cortex	bark
crem	cremor	a cream
cyath	cyathus	glass
d	dies	a day
deglut	deglutiat	let it be swallowed
dest	destillatus	distilled
dexter		right
dieb altern	diebus alternis	every other day
d in p aeq	divide in partes aequales	divide into equal parts
dol urg	dolore urgente	when the pain is severe
dolent part	dolenti parti	to the afflicted part
dp	directione propria	with proper direction
dulc	dulcis	sweet
dup	duplex	double
dur	durus	hard
dur dol	durante dolore	while the pain lasts
emp	emplastrum	a plaster
enem	enema	an enema
ex aq	ex aqua	with water
ext	extractum	an extract
f or ft	fiat (fiant)	let it (them) be made
flav	flavus	yellow
fort	fortis	strong
frigid	frigidus	cold
fusc	fuscus	brown
garg	gargarisma	a gargle
gtt	guttae	drops
guttur	appl gutturi applicandus	to be applied to the throat
hab	habeat	let him have (or take)
hac noct	hac nocte	tonight
haust	haustus	a draught
hd	hora decubitus	at bedtime
hs	hora somni	at bedtime
ic	inter cibos	between meals