



Glossary of old medical terms

A	
A ffrighted	Frightened to death. Probably a stress-induced heart attack or stroke
Ague	Any intermittent fever characterised by periods of chills, fevers and sweats. Most commonly identified as malaria.
Apoplex / Apoplexy	Stroke or the paralysis resulting from a stroke
B	
Bad Blood	Syphilis
Bilious fever	A term loosely applied to intestinal fevers and malarial fever.
Black Death	Bubonic plague
Bladder In Throat	Diphtheria
Bloody Flux	Dysentery involving a discharge of blood
Brain fever	Meningitis or typhus
Break Bone Fever	Dengue fever
C	
Camp Diarrhoea	Typhus
Camp fever	Typhus
Canine Madness	Rabies
Canker	A severe, destructive, eroding ulcer of the cheek and lip. It commonly followed one of the eruptive fevers and was often fatal.
Child Bed (Fever)	Infection in the mother following birth of a child, probably due to staphylococcus
Choak	Croup
Cholera Infantum	A common, non-contagious diarrhoea of young children, occurring in summer or autumn. Death frequently occurred in three to five days.
Cholera Morbus	Illness with vomiting, abdominal cramps and elevated temperature. Possibly appendicitis
Cholera	An acute, infectious disease characterised by profuse diarrhoea, vomiting, and cramps. It is spread by faeces-contaminated water and food.
Chorea	Involuntary twitching of the muscles and uncoordinated movements.
Chrisome	A child in the first month of life
Cold Plague	Ague characterised by chills
Colic	Convulsive pain in the abdomen or bowels.
Commotion	Concussion
Congestion	An excessive or abnormal accumulation of blood or other fluid in a body part or blood vessel
Congestive Chills / Fever	Malaria
Consumption	Tuberculosis
Contagious Pyrexia	Dysentery
Corruption	General term for infection
Cow Pox	A non-fatal disease similar to smallpox, affecting cattle and transmissible to humans. Used to produce the first vaccinations.
Cramp Colic	Appendicitis
Croup	Any obstructive condition of the larynx or trachea, characterised by a hoarse, barking cough and difficult breathing. It occurs chiefly in infants and children.
Cut of the Stone	The surgical removal of a bladder stone.

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D	
Day Fever	Fever lasting one day
Diphtheria	A serious infectious disease that attacks any mucous membrane, although it normally affects the throat or nose.
Distemper	Disturbed condition of the body or mind; ill health, illness; a mental or physical disorder; a disease or ailment
Dock Fever	Yellow fever
Domestic Illness	Mental breakdown, depression
Dropsy	Abnormal swelling of the body or part of the body due to the build-up of clear watery fluid
Dropsy of the Brain	Encephalitis
Dysentery	A term given to a number of disorders marked by inflammation of the large intestine and attended by frequent stools containing blood and mucus
E	
Eclampsia	Historically used as a general term for convulsions. Today identified with convulsions arising from toxæmia accompanying pregnancy
Eel Thing	Erysipelas
Effluvia	Exhalations or emanations, applied especially to those of noxious character
Emphysema	A chronic, irreversible disease of the lungs, characterised by shortness of breath, hacking cough, cyanosis and a "barrel-shaped" chest
Enteric fever	Typhoid
Epilepsy	A disorder of the nervous system, characterised either by mild, episodic loss of attention or sleepiness or by severe convulsions with loss of consciousness
Ergot	A fungal disease of edible grasses. When ingested, the fungus can infect humans, producing either convulsions or gangrene.
Erysipelas	An acute streptococcal infection of the skin characterised by a spreading, deep-red inflammation.
F	
Fainting Fits	Probably a euphemism for epilepsy
Falling Sickness	Epilepsy
Fistula	An unnatural communication between two different body structures.
Flux	Dysentery
French Pox	Syphilis
Frogg	Croup
Furuncle	Boil
G	
Galloping Consumption	Pulmonary tuberculosis
Gangrene	Massive tissue death due to injury, disease, or failure of blood supply
Gathering	A collection of pus
General Paralysis of the Insane	Syphilis affecting the brain
Gout	Painful inflammation caused by a build up of uric acid in the tissues.
Great Pox	Syphilis
Green Fever	Anaemia
Green Sickness	Anaemia
Grip, Gripe or Grippe	Influenza
Grocer's Itch	Skin disease caused by mites in sugar or flour
H	
Hectic fever	A daily recurring fever with profound sweating, chills, and flushed appearance, often associated with pulmonary tuberculosis or septic poisoning.
Hives	A skin eruption of wheals that result from an allergic reaction. Severe allergic reaction can cause death from anaphylactic shock.
Horrors	Delirium tremens
Hospital fever	Typhus
Hydropsy	The full name of dropsy

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I

Ichor	Leakage of fluid from a sore or wound.
Impostume	Abscess
Infantile Paralysis	Poliomyelitis (polio)
Intermittent Fever	Illness marked by episodes of fever with return to completely normal temperature; usually malaria.

J

Jail fever	Typhus
Jawfaln	Literally a fallen jaw also referred to as a locked jaw. Possibly tetanus.

K

King's evil	Scrofula
Kink	Fit of coughing or choking

L

Leprosy	A chronic bacterial disease affecting mainly skin and nerves. If untreated, there can be progressive and permanent damage to the skin, nerves, limbs and eyes
Livergrown	Possibly Rickets. John Graunt observed that Bills or Mortality showing many deaths from Rickets showed few or none Livergrown and vice versa.
Lockjaw	Tetanus
Long Sickness	Tuberculosis
Lung Fever	Pneumonia
Lung Sickness	Tuberculosis

M

Malignant fever	Typhus
Malignant Pustule	Anthrax
Malignant Sore Throat	Diphtheria
Melancholia	Severe depression
Membranous Croup	Diphtheria
Meagrom, Megrim	A severe headache, often limited to one side of the head
Miasma	Poisonous vapours thought to infect the air and cause disease
Milk Fever	Short lived fever which sometimes accompanies lactation, probably a staphylococcus infection
Milk Leg	Thrombosis of veins in the thigh usually seen after childbirth
Morbilli	Measles
Morbus Cordis	Heart disease. A catch-all phrase for death by natural causes when the exact cause was not evident
Mormal	Gangrene
Morphew	Blisters resulting from scurvy
Mortification	Gangrene, necrosis

N

Necrosis	The death of tissue
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O

Oedema	Fluid retention, dropsy
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P

Palsy	Paralysis or difficulty with muscle control
Paroxysm	Convulsion
Pernicious Anaemia	Anaemia caused by vitamin B12 deficiency
Pertussis	Whooping cough
Phthisis	Tuberculosis
Pink Disease	Disease of teething infants due to mercury poisoning from teething powders
Plague	Any infectious disease with a high mortality rate, although will often mean bubonic plague
Planet-struck	Any sudden severe affliction or paralysis
Pleurisie / Pleurisy	Inflammation of the pleura, the membranous sac lining the chest cavity. Symptoms are chills, fever, dry cough, and pain in the affected side.
Pneumonia	Inflammation of the lungs with congestion or consolidation
Porphyria	Rare metabolic disturbance that may cause mental damage in young children. It produces convulsions and delirium.
Potter's Asthma	Tuberculosis
Pox	Syphilis
Puerperal Exhaustion	Death due to childbirth
Puerperal Fever	Infection after giving birth, probably a staphylococcus infection
Puking Fever	Milk sickness
Purples	This is a rash due to spontaneous bleeding in to the skin. It may be a symptom of some severe illnesses, including bacterial endocarditis and cerebrospinal meningitis.
Putrid fever	Typhus
Putrid sore throat	Ulceration of an acute form, attacking the tonsils

Q

Quinsy	An acute inflammation of the tonsils, often leading to an abscess
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R

Rag-Picker's Disease	Anthrax
Remitting Fever	Malaria
Rising Of The Lights	Generally considered to be croup. However, the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as hysteria and John Graunt suggests that it may be an inflammation of the liver, similar to livergrown (q.v.)

S

Scarlet fever or Scarlet Rash	An infectious fever, characterised by a widespread scarlet eruption
Scouring or scowring	Purging of the bowels, probably diarrhoea or dysentery
Screws	Rheumatism
Scrivener's Palsy	Writer's cramp
Scrofula or scrofula fugax	Primary tuberculosis of the lymphatic glands, especially those in the neck. A disease of children and young adults, it represents a direct extension of tuberculosis into the skin from underlying lymph nodes. It evolves into cold abscesses, multiple skin ulcers, and draining sinus tracts.
Scrofula mesenterica	An internal non-pulmonary tuberculosis, resulting in a swollen abdomen, loss of appetite and a pale complexion
Scrofula vulgaris	An itchy rash associated with hospitals. Most probably a streptococcal infection
Scurvy	A disease caused by severe vitamin C deficiency
Ship fever	Typhus
Sloes	Milk sickness
Small Pox	Highly infectious viral disease producing pustules.
Softening of the Brain	Stroke
Sore Throat Distemper	Diphtheria or quinsy
Spanish Disease	Syphilis
Spanish Influenza	The variant of influenza that was responsible for the 1918 pandemic
Spotted fever	Meningitis or typhus
St Anthony's Fire	Skin disease caused by toxins from ergot infection. Sometimes used for erysipelas and other diseases producing a reddening of the skin.
St Vitus Dance	Chorea
Strangury	Painful urination. It may occur after labour, but is more often the result of disease in the bladder or urethra.

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Stuffing
Surfet or surfeit
Swamp Sickness
Sweating Sickness

Croup
Vomiting from over eating or gluttony
Malaria, typhoid or encephalitis
Infectious and often fatal disease affecting England in the 15th century

T

Teeth

Death of an infant when teething. Children appear to have been more susceptible to infection during this time, although malnutrition from being fed watered milk has also been suggested as a cause.

Tetanus

An infectious, often-fatal disease characterised by respiratory paralysis and tonic spasms and rigidity of the voluntary muscles, especially those of the neck and lower jaw. The bacterium enters the body through wounds.

Thrush

A disease characterised by whitish spots and ulcers on the membranes of the mouth, tongue, and throat caused by a parasitic fungus. Thrush usually affects sick, weak infants and elderly individuals in poor health

Tissick
Typhoid

Cough

Typhoid fever is contracted when people eat food or drink water that has been infected. It is recognized by the sudden onset of sustained fever, severe headache, nausea and severe loss of appetite. It is sometimes accompanied by hoarse cough and constipation or diarrhoea

Tympany
Typhus

A swelling or tumour

An acute, infectious disease transmitted by lice and fleas

W

Wolf
Worm Fit

A rapidly expanding growth, probably a malignant tumour

Convulsions associated with teething, worms, elevated temperature or diarrhoea

Old Medical Term Websites

1. **Rudy's List of Archaic Medical Terms**
 - www.archaicmedicalterms.com
 -
2. **Old Archaic Medical terms and Clinical names for diseases**
www.genproxy.co.uk/old_medical_terms.htm
 -
3. **Old Medical terms for use by Genealogists**
freepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wakefield/definitions/defmedic.html
 -
4. **Glossary of Old Medical Terms - Craig Thornber**
www.thornber.net/medicine/html/medgloss.html
 -
5. **Medical Terms - Web Sites for Genealogists**
www.coraweb.com.au/medico.htm
 -
6. **Old Medical Terms - Fenton Historical Society**
fentonhistsoc.tripod.com/id121.html
 -
7. **Old Disease names and their modern definitions**
www.disease.pricklytree.co.uk/
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Glossary extracted from http://www.bignell.uk.com/glossary_of_old_names.htm