



ARTEMIS

INTERACTIVE MEDIA



SAFE MEDICATION ABBREVIATIONS

~ at a Glance ~



Always follow your facility's approved abbreviations. Safety comes first!



IMPORTANT TO KNOW

There is **NO** universal "approved abbreviations" list. The Joint Commission requires each healthcare organization to standardize the terminology and abbreviations they use.

Follow your facility policy.



THE JOINT COMMISSION "DO NOT USE" LIST

These abbreviations look or sound alike and can lead to serious medication errors.

DO NOT USE these on medication orders or related documentation.

COMMONLY ACCEPTED PRESCRIPTION ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATION	MEANING	ABBREVIATION	MEANING
PO	By mouth / orally	BID	Twice daily
SL	Sublingual	TID	Three times daily
IM	Intramuscular	QID	Four times daily
IV	Intravenous	q1h	Every hour
ID	Intradermal	q2h	Every 2 hours
SubQ / SQ*	Subcutaneous	q4h	Every 4 hours
PR	Rectally	q6h	Every 6 hours
PRN	As needed	q8h	Every 8 hours
STAT	Immediately	q12h	Every 12 hours
AC	Before meals	NPO	Nothing by mouth
PC	After meals	g	Gram
HS*	At bedtime	mg	Milligram
		mcg	Microgram
		mL	Milliliter
		L	Liter

*Use SubQ/SQ and HS cautiously.

Institutional policies vary, and ISMP identifies many abbreviations beyond the Joint Commission minimum list as error-prone.

DO NOT USE

WRITE INSTEAD

U / u	unit
IU	international unit
QD / qd / Q.D. / q.d.	daily
QOD / qod / Q.O.D. / q.o.d.	every other day
5.0 mg	5 mg
.5 mg	0.5 mg
MS	morphine sulfate
MSO ₄	morphine sulfate
MgSO ₄	magnesium sulfate



These prohibited forms apply to medication orders and medication-related documentation.

REMEMBER



- Read abbreviations carefully.
- Use leading zeros.
- Avoid unnecessary trailing zeros.
- When in doubt, **WRITE IT OUT!**

TEACHING TIPS TO PREVENT ERRORS



NO trailing zero:

5 mg ✓ – 5.0 mg ✗

Why? 5.0 can be misread as 50 mg.



ALWAYS use a leading zero:

0.5 mg ✓ – .5 mg ✗

Why? .5 can be misread as 5 mg.

SAFETY CHECK



- ✓ Right Patient
- ✓ Right Medication
- ✓ Right Dose
- ✓ Right Route
- ✓ Right Time
- ✓ Right Documentation



Clear communication. Safe care. Better outcomes.

Thank you, Artemis!



Take AIM and Score!



Quiz

Test your knowledge by answering the following questions

1. The nurse reviews several medication prescriptions. Which prescription should the nurse clarify before administering the medication?
 - A. Acetaminophen 650 mg PO PRN
 - B. Medication 5 mg PO daily
 - C. Medication .5 mg PO
 - D. Medication 250 mg IV
2. Which medication prescription demonstrates correct use of a decimal?
 - A. Medication 0.5 mg PO
 - B. Medication .5 mg PO
 - C. Medication 5.0 mg PO
 - D. Medication 5.00 mg PO
3. The nurse sees “**10 U**” written on a medication order. Which action is most appropriate?
 - A. Interpret the abbreviation as 10 units
 - B. Administer the medication after another nurse verifies the order
 - C. Change “U” to “units” in the medication record
 - D. Clarify the order because **U** should not be used as an abbreviation for units
4. Which prescription uses an abbreviation on The Joint Commission's **Do Not Use** list?
 - A. Medication 10 mg PO PRN
 - B. Medication 20 mg QD
 - C. Medication 5 mg IV
 - D. Medication 25 mg PO BID
5. The nurse reviews an order containing the abbreviation **MS**. What is the nurse's priority action?
 - A. Interpret MS as morphine sulfate
 - B. Interpret MS as magnesium sulfate
 - C. Clarify the order because **MS** can be misinterpreted and should be written out
 - D. Ask the patient which medication is normally taken



Word Search

Find the words in the grid

H	T	H	J	S	C	R	A	Z	E	M	N	F	E	E	S	L	S	R	T	P	Y
C	T	T	N	N	C	H	D	P	L	Z	E	L	T	F	M	I	U	D	N	T	L
I	D	Z	E	Q	S	U	B	C	U	T	A	N	E	O	U	S	B	C	Z	A	A
N	D	I	R	K	Z	M	A	R	D	T	M	I	D	I	I	I	L	K	R	S	I
Y	F	I	R	A	L	C	M	F	E	I	R	A	I	P	N	I	I	O	R	E	R
I	L	N	A	R	N	A	D	O	I	W	X	E	C	S	T	N	N	R	R	R	L
V	M	N	T	S	F	X	T	I	R	N	N	C	Y	I	H	E	G	E	A	G	C
E	O	M	F	A	B	A	E	C	I	L	D	H	T	T	I	T	U	E	L	C	V
R	L	Y	E	D	K	L	R	N	E	C	D	R	E	R	F	E	A	B	U	N	D
I	E	E	I	D	E	N	N	A	H	R	K	T	F	A	A	P	L	O	C	E	E
F	M	V	Z	E	I	I	N	K	G	T	I	O	A	I	Q	E	L	S	S	G	E
Y	R	S	R	R	A	A	S	O	A	I	O	G	S	C	A	R	I	D	U	N	X
R	G	I	T	Q	T	A	T	M	A	P	K	D	F	D	L	D	A	S	M	R	Z
L	O	X	T	O	A	L	A	E	J	A	E	E	I	G	S	I	G	E	A	A	J
R	B	L	I	I	A	R	D	S	L	J	N	N	Q	D	L	R	R	O	R	R	E
I	I	A	L	E	G	A	S	O	C	Y	G	I	N	Y	E	C	N	G	T	F	E
P	T	T	C	O	N	K	N	L	S	Z	T	A	L	Q	S	D	I	L	N	P	A
R	Z	D	R	A	I	V	J	E	E	E	O	E	L	R	R	L	E	I	I	P	L
A	O	C	O	C	D	R	T	R	I	E	T	H	W	I	I	E	I	E	E	E	T
M	I	N	P	P	S	U	O	N	E	V	A	R	T	N	I	Q	G	M	N	I	L
M	A	R	C	T	J	S	A	A	A	I	T	A	O	E	L	O	A	A	R	S	A
A	E	N	U	N	I	T	N	C	T	T	C	N	N	V	W	G	E	Z	A	R	A

**ORAL • SUBLINGUAL • INTRAVENOUS • INTRAMUSCULAR
• SUBCUTANEOUS • RECTAL • AS NEEDED • IMMEDIATELY • DAILY •
DOSE • UNIT • MICROGRAM • LEADING ZERO • SAFETY • VERIFY
• CLARIFY**

Take AIM and Score!



Prescription Abbreviations — Clinical Unscramble

Use the sentence clue to unscramble each nursing term.

1. A medication given by mouth is administered by this route. ARLO

Answer: _____

2. A medication placed under the tongue for absorption is administered by this route. LBLUGNASUI

Answer: _____

3. A medication administered directly into a vein is given by this route. TRNAUOIEVSN

Answer: _____

4. This term indicates that a medication should be given when the patient requires it according to the prescription. AS DENEDE

Answer: _____

5. This term indicates that a medication should be administered without delay. YMLDIAIEMET

Answer: _____

6. For a medication dose less than one, this should be placed before the decimal point to help prevent dosing errors. GDNAEIL ZROE

Answer: _____

7. Before administering a medication, the nurse performs this action to confirm that medication information is accurate and appropriate. VYERIF

Answer: _____

8. When medication terminology is unclear, unfamiliar, or potentially unsafe, the nurse should perform this action rather than guess its meaning. LAYRIFC

Answer: _____

Take AIM and Score!



ARTEMIS

INTERACTIVE MEDIA

Abbreviation	Meaning
PO	By mouth / orally
SL	Sublingual
IM	Intramuscular
IV	Intravenous
ID	Intradermal
SubQ / SQ*	Subcutaneous
PR	Rectally
PRN	As needed
STAT	Immediately
AC	Before meals
PC	After meals
HS*	At bedtime
BID	Twice daily
TID	Three times daily
QID	Four times daily
q1h	Every hour
q2h	Every 2 hours
q4h	Every 4 hours
q6h	Every 6 hours
q8h	Every 8 hours
q12h	Every 12 hours
NPO	Nothing by mouth
g	Gram
mg	Milligram
mcg	Microgram
mL	Milliliter
L	Liter

Take AIM and Score!

 The Joint Commission “Do Not Use” List

DO NOT USE	Write Instead
U / u	unit
IU	international unit
QD / qd / Q.D. / q.d.	daily
QOD / qod / Q.O.D. / q.o.d.	every other day
5.0 mg	5 mg
.5 mg	0.5 mg
MS	morphine sulfate
MSO ₄	morphine sulfate
MgSO ₄	magnesium sulfate

Why Avoid “Do Not Use” Abbreviations?

Abbreviations on the **Do Not Use** list can be misread, **misunderstood, or confused with other medication terminology**, increasing the risk of medication errors and patient harm. Writing medication names, doses, and frequencies clearly helps ensure that every member of the healthcare team interprets the order correctly. When medication terminology is unclear or potentially unsafe, **never guess—clarify before administering.**

Answer Key

Answer to Quiz

1. **C — Medication .5 mg PO.** A **leading zero is required** for doses less than 1: **0.5 mg**, not .5 mg. Without the zero, the decimal point may be missed.
2. **A — Medication 0.5 mg PO.** Use a **leading zero**, but avoid unnecessary trailing zeros.
3. **D — Clarify the order.** U/u is on The Joint Commission's Do Not Use list. **Unit** should be written out.
4. **B — Medication 20 mg QD.** **QD** can be mistaken for other dosing frequencies. Write **daily** instead.
5. **C — Clarify the order.** **MS** is unsafe because it may be interpreted incorrectly. **Morphine sulfate** should be written out.

Word Bank for Unscramble

ORAL • SUBLINGUAL • INTRAVENOUS • AS NEEDED • IMMEDIATELY • LEADING ZERO • VERIFY • CLARIFY

Word Search

