

Table. Institute for Safe Medication Practices' List of Commonly Mistaken Abbreviations and Symbols

ABBREVIATION	INTENDED MEANING	MISINTERPRETATION	CORRECTION
Apothecary symbols	dram, minim	Misunderstood or misread (symbol for dram misread for "3" and minim misread as "mL").	Use the metric system.
AU	aurio uterque (each ear)	Mistaken for OU (oculo uterque-each eye).	Don't use this abbreviation.
D/C	discharge, discontinue	Discharge mistaken for discontinue, vice versa	Use "discharge" and "discontinue."
Drug names			
ARA ^o A	vidarabine	CytarabineARA ^o C	Use complete spelling of drug names.
AZT	zidovudine (Retrovir)	Azathioprine	
CPZ	Compazine (prochlorperazine)	Chlorpromazine	
DPT	Demerol-Phenergan-Thorazine	Diphtheria-pertussis-tetanus (vaccine)	
HCl	hydrochloric acid	Potassium chloride (The "H" is misinterpreted as "K.")	
HCT	hydrocortisone	Hydrochlorothiazide	
HCTZ	hydrochlorothiazide	Hydrocortisone (seen as HCT250 mg)	
MgSO ₄ , MSO ₄	magnesium sulfate, morphine sulfate	Mistaken for each other	
MTX	methotrexate	Mitoxantrone	
TAC	triamcinolone	Tetracaine, adrenaline, cocaine	
ZnSO ₄	zinc sulfate	Morphine sulfate	
Stemmed names			
Norflox	norfloxacin	Norflex	
mg	microgram	Mistaken for "mg" when handwritten.	Use "mcg."
o.d. or OD	once daily	Misinterpreted as "right eye" (OD-oculus dexter) and administration of oral medications in the eye.	Use "daily."
TIW or tiw	three times a week	Mistaken as "three times a day."	Don't use this abbreviation.
per os	orally	The "os" can be mistaken for "left eye."	Use "PO," "by mouth," or "orally."
q.d. or QD	every day	Mistaken as q.i.d., especially if the period after the "q" or the tail of the "q" is misunderstood as an "i."	Use "daily" or "every day."
qn	nightly or at bedtime	Misinterpreted as "qh" (every hour).	Use "nightly."
qhs	nightly at bedtime	Misread as every hour.	Use "nightly."
q6PM, etc.	every evening at 6 p.m.	Misread as every six hours.	Use 6 p.m. "nightly."
q.o.d. or QOD	every other day	Misinterpreted as "q.d." (daily) or "q.i.d. (four times daily) if the "o" is poorly written.	Use "every other day."
sub q, SC	subcutaneous	"q" mistaken for "every," SC mistaken for SL	Use "subcut." or write "subcutaneous."
U or u	unit	Read as a 0 or a 4 (e.g., 4U seen as "40").	"Unit" has no acceptable abbreviation. Use "unit."
IU	international unit	Misread as IV (intravenous).	Use "units."
cc	cubic centimeters	Misread as "U" (units).	Use "mL."
x3d	for three days	Mistaken for "three doses."	Use "for three days."
BT	bedtime	Mistaken as "BID" (twice daily).	Use "hs."
> and <	greater than and less than	Mistakenly used opposite of intended.	Use "greater than" or "less than."
/ (slash mark)	separates two doses or indicates "per"	Misunderstood as the number 1	Do not use. Use "per."
0 after decimal point (1.0)	1 mg	Misread as 10 mg if the decimal point is not seen.	Do not use terminal 0 for whole-number doses.
No 0 before decimal	0.5 mg	Misread as 5 mg.	Use 0 before a decimal with doses less than a whole number.
µg	microgram	Misinterpreted as "mg"	Write "mcg" for microgram.