

POSITIONAL AND DIRECTIONAL TERMS

Positional and directional terms are used in healthcare terminology to describe up and down, middle and side, and front and back. Because people may be lying down, raising their arms, and so on, standard English terms cannot be used to describe direction. The following table lists directional and positional terms as opposite pairs, with their respective combining forms or prefixes and illustrations. For example, x-rays may be taken from the front of the body to the back—an **anteroposterior (AP)** view—or from the back to the front—a **posteroanterior (PA)** view (Figs. 2-3 and 2-4). The midline of the body is an imaginary line drawn from the crown of the head down between the eyes, through the chest, and separating the legs.






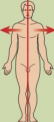



Fig. 2-3 Patient positioned for anteroposterior (AP) x-ray of the chest.











Fig. 2-4 Patient positioned for posteroanterior (PA) x-ray of the chest.






Positional and Directional Terms

	Term	Word Origin	Definition
	anterior (ant) ventral	<i>anter/o</i> front <i>-ior</i> pertaining to <i>ventr/o</i> belly <i>-al</i> pertaining to	Pertaining to the front. Pertaining to the belly side.
	posterior (pos) dorsal	<i>poster/o</i> back <i>-ior</i> pertaining to <i>dors/o</i> back <i>-al</i> pertaining to	Pertaining to the back. Pertaining to the back of the body.
	superior (sup) cephalad	<i>super/o</i> upward <i>-ior</i> pertaining to <i>cephal/o</i> head <i>-ad</i> toward	Pertaining to upward. Toward the head.
	inferior (inf) caudad	<i>infer/o</i> downward <i>-ior</i> pertaining to <i>caud/o</i> tail <i>-ad</i> toward	Pertaining to downward. Toward the tail.
	medial	<i>medi/o</i> middle <i>-al</i> pertaining to	Pertaining to the middle (midline).
	lateral (lat)	<i>later/o</i> side <i>-al</i> pertaining to	Pertaining to the side.
	ipsilateral	<i>ipsi-</i> same <i>later/o</i> side <i>-al</i> pertaining to	Pertaining to the same side.

Positional and Directional Terms—cont'd

	Term	Word Origin	Definition
	contralateral	<i>contra-</i> opposite <i>later/o</i> side <i>-al</i> pertaining to	Pertaining to the opposite side.
	unilateral	<i>uni-</i> one <i>later/o</i> side <i>-al</i> pertaining to	Pertaining to one side.
	bilateral	<i>bi-</i> two <i>later/o</i> side <i>-al</i> pertaining to	Pertaining to two sides.
	superficial (external)		On the surface of the body.
	deep (internal)		Away from the surface of the body.
	proximal	<i>proxim/o</i> near <i>-al</i> pertaining to	Pertaining to near the origin.
	distal	<i>dist/o</i> far <i>-al</i> pertaining to	Pertaining to far from the origin.
	dextrad*	<i>dextr/o</i> right <i>-ad</i> toward	Toward the right.

Positional and Directional Terms—cont'd

	Term	Word Origin	Definition
	sinistrad*	<i>sinistr/o</i> left <i>-ad</i> toward	Toward the left.
	afferent	<i>af-</i> toward <i>fer/o</i> to carry <i>-ent</i> pertaining to	Pertaining to carrying toward a structure.
	efferent	<i>ef-</i> away from <i>fer/o</i> to carry <i>-ent</i> pertaining to	Pertaining to carrying away from a structure.
	supine		Lying on one's back.
	prone		Lying on one's belly.

*This is the *patient's*, not the reader's, right and left.



Exercise 10: Positional and Directional Terms

Match the terms with their correct definitions.

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| ___ 1. medial | A. pertaining to downward |
| ___ 2. inferior | B. pertaining to carrying away from a structure |
| ___ 3. distal | C. pertaining to the middle |
| ___ 4. anterior | D. pertaining to the opposite side |
| ___ 5. dorsal | E. away from the surface of the body |
| ___ 6. supine | F. pertaining to far from the origin |
| ___ 7. prone | G. pertaining to carrying toward a structure |
| ___ 8. deep | H. pertaining to the same side |
| ___ 9. contralateral | I. pertaining to the back of the body |
| ___ 10. ipsilateral | J. lying on one's back |
| ___ 11. afferent | K. pertaining to the front |
| ___ 12. efferent | L. lying on one's belly |



Exercise 14: Planes of the Body

1. Which plane divides the body into superior and inferior portions? _____
2. Which plane divides the body into equal left and right sections? _____
3. Which plane divides the body into anterior and posterior sections? _____



Exercise 10: Positional and Directional Terms

Match the terms with their correct definitions.

- | | | | |
|----------|------------------|----|--|
| <u>C</u> | 1. medial | A. | pertaining to downward |
| <u>A</u> | 2. inferior | B. | pertaining to carrying away from a structure |
| <u>F</u> | 3. distal | C. | pertaining to the middle |
| <u>K</u> | 4. anterior | D. | pertaining to the opposite side |
| <u>I</u> | 5. dorsal | E. | away from the surface of the body |
| <u>J</u> | 6. supine | F. | pertaining to far from the origin |
| <u>L</u> | 7. prone | G. | pertaining to carrying toward a structure |
| <u>E</u> | 8. deep | H. | pertaining to the same side |
| <u>D</u> | 9. contralateral | I. | pertaining to the back of the body |
| <u>H</u> | 10. ipsilateral | J. | lying on one's back |
| <u>B</u> | 11. afferent | K. | pertaining to the front |
| <u>G</u> | 12. efferent | L. | lying on one's belly |



Exercise 14: Planes of the Body

1. Which plane divides the body into superior and inferior portions? Transverse Plane
2. Which plane divides the body into equal left and right sections? Midsagittal Plane
3. Which plane divides the body into anterior and posterior sections? Frontal Plane