

COMMON ABBREVIATIONS IN MEDICATION ORDERS

a or a. before
a.c. before meals
ad lib as desired
alt. h. alternate hours
am in the morning; before noon
aq. water
bid twice a day
c⁻ with
cap., caps. capsule
dil. dilute
dist. distilled
DS double strength
EC enteric coated
elix. elixir
ext. external, extract
fl, fld fluid
g gram
gr grain

gtt drop
H hypodermic
h, hr hour
IM intramuscular
inj. injection
IV intravenous
IVP IV push
IVPB IV piggyback
kg kilogram
L liter
lb pound
liq. liquid
mcg, mg microgram
mEq milliequivalent
mg milligram
mL milliliter
noct. night
om on morning
on on night

oz ounce
p or p. after, per
p.c. after meals
PO by mouth
pm afternoon, evening
prn as needed, according to necessity
q each, every
qh every hour
qid, Qqds four times a day
q1h every 1 hour
q2h every 2 hours
q3h every 3 hours
q4h every 4 hours
q6h every 6 hours
q8h every 8 hours
q12h every 12 hours
qs as much as needed, quantity, sufficient

qt quart
R. or PR rectally, per rectum
Rx take, prescription
S, Sig give the following directions
s⁻ without
sid once daily
sol. or soln. solution
SQ subcutaneous
stat. immediately, at once
tab. tablet
tbsp, T tablespoon
tds, tid three times a day
tinct., tr tincture
tsp, t teaspoon
ung. ointment

Modified from Craven RF, Hirnle CJ, eds. Fundamentals of nursing: human health and function. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2000.

COMMON ABBREVIATIONS NOT TO BE USED IN MEDICATION ORDERS

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations' list of dangerous abbreviations, acronyms, and symbols not to be used was originally created in 2004 and updated May 2005.

Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO): www.jcaho.org

As of May 2005, the survey and scoring of this requirement applies to all orders and all medication-related documentation that is handwritten (including free-text computer entry) or on preprinted forms.

Official “Do Not Use” List

Abbreviation	Potential Problem	Preferred Term
U (for unit)	Mistaken as 0 (zero), 4 (four), or cc.	Write “unit”.
IU (for international unit)	Mistaken as IV (intravenous) or 10 (ten)	Write “international unit”.
Q.D., QD, q.d., qd (daily) Q.O.D., QOD, q.o.d, qod (every other day)	Mistaken for each other. Period after the Q mistaken for “I” and the “O” mistaken for “I”.	Write “daily”. Write “every other day”.
Trailing zero (X.0 mg), lack of leading zero (.X mg)	Decimal point is missed.	Never write a zero by itself after a decimal point (X mg)*. Always use a zero before a decimal point (0.X mg).
MS, MSO ₄ and MgSO ₄	Can mean morphine sulfate or magnesium sulfate. Confused for one another.	Write “morphine sulfate” Write “magnesium sulfate”

An abbreviation on the “do not use” list should not be used in any of its forms—upper or lower case, with or without periods. For example, if Q.D. is on your list, you cannot use QD or qd. Any of those variations may be confusing and could be misinterpreted.

*Exception: a “trailing zero” may be used only where required to demonstrate the level of precision of the value being reported, such as for laboratory results, imaging studies that report size of lesions, or catheter/tube sizes. It may not be used in medication orders or other medication-related documentation.

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Additional Abbreviations, Acronyms, and Symbols

Organizations may consider adding any or all of these to their own list of abbreviations not to use. The following items will be reviewed annually by JHACO for possible future inclusion on the official “do not use” list.

Abbreviation	Potential Problem	Preferred Term
> (greater than), < (less than)	Mistaken for 7 (seven) or the letter “L”. Confused for one another.	Write “greater than” or “less than”.
Abbreviations for drug names	Misinterpreted due to similar abbreviations for multiple drugs.	Write drug names in full.
Apothecary units	Unfamiliar to many practitioners. Confused with metric units.	Use metric units.
@	Mistaken for 2 (two).	Write “at”.
cc (for cubic centimeter)	Mistaken for U (units) when poorly written.	Write “ml” or “milliliters”.
µg (for microgram)	Mistaken for mg (milligrams), resulting in one thousand-fold overdose.	Write “meg” or “micrograms”.