

A Guide for Readers

The Merck Manual of Medical Information—Home Edition is organized into sections and chapters. Understanding this organization will help the reader navigate through the book and find the most information. Topics of interest may be quickly located by consulting the Table of Contents or Index.

Sections

The first section—Fundamentals—covers many general topics important to health care, such as aging, communicating with health care professionals, prevention of disease and disability, exercise and fitness, rehabilitation, and death and dying. The Accidents and Injuries section includes a chapter on first aid. The last section—Special Subjects—provides an overview of medical decision making, surgery, complementary and alternative medicine, and travel and health, among other topics.

Most sections in the book cover the disorders of one organ or organ system, such as those of the eye, skin, or heart and blood vessels. A few sections cover one type of disorder, such as hormonal disorders or infectious diseases. Three separate sections cover health issues of men, women, and children.

Chapters

Some chapters describe a single disorder. Other chapters cover a group of related disorders. In either case, the discussion of a disorder usually starts with a definition of that disorder, printed in italics. The information that follows is typically organized under headings, such as causes, symptoms, diagnosis, prevention, treatment, and prognosis. Bold-faced type within the text indicates topics of major importance.

In sections about disorders of an organ or organ system, the first chapter describes the organ's normal structure and function. Reading about how the heart works or looking at illustrations of the heart, for example, may make a specific heart disorder more understandable. Many sections also include a chapter describing symptoms and the medical tests used to diagnose the disorders discussed in that section.

Cross-references

Throughout the book are cross-references that identify other important or related discussions of a subject. Cross-references are marked with a symbol within the text (▲, ■, ★, ●, ◆, ▼). Corresponding symbols, along with the page number where more information can be found, are located at the bottom of the page. Some cross-references point the reader to an illustration, sidebar, or table on a specific page.

Medical Terms

Medical terms are often provided, usually in parentheses after the common term. On page xxxvii is a list of prefixes, roots, and suffixes used in

medical terminology. This list can help take the mystery out of medicine's multisyllabic vocabulary.

Illustrations, Sidebars, and Tables

The book contains many illustrations, sidebars, and tables. They help explain material in the text or give additional, related information. The reader can also refer to the 8 pages of full-color anatomical drawings to locate different parts of the body and see how they relate to each other.

Drug Information

The Drugs section provides comprehensive information about drugs, as well as medicinal herbs and nutraceuticals. Also, scattered throughout the book are many drug tables, marked by an Rx symbol. These drug tables provide additional information about a class or group of drugs.

In this book, individual drugs are almost always referred to by their generic name rather than by their brand or trade names. Appendix III contains a table of the generic drugs mentioned in the book along with some of their corresponding trade names. Appendix III also provides a separate table of trade names with their corresponding generic name.

The book does not provide drug doses because doses can vary greatly, depending on individual circumstances. For example, doses are affected by age, sex, weight, height, the presence of more than one disorder, and the use of other drugs. Therefore, health care professionals tailor the dose of a drug to the individual.

Diagnostic Tests

Diagnostic tests are mentioned throughout the book. Usually, an explanation is provided the first time a test is mentioned in a chapter. In addition, Appendix II lists many common diagnostic tests and procedures, explains what they are used for, and provides cross-references to where more detailed discussions of a test or procedure can be found.

Resources for Help and Information

Appendix IV lists contact information of many organizations that help people who have specific disorders. These organizations can provide additional information about a disorder or help locate support services.