Substitute Word List

Since health writing usually uses technical terms, it is helpful to the reader to use shorter words whenever possible. Here is a list of words that are commonly found in health literature. Using the substitute word instead of the technical word will help lower the readability level of your material. This list was adapted from:


ability - skill
accomplish - carry out
alternative - choice
ambulate – walk
annually – yearly
apply - put on, use
approximately – about
assist – help
attempt- try
available – ready
bacteria – germs
cell culture - tissue study
cerebral hemorrhage – stroke
cessation - stop, pause
chorionic villi – tissue
cognizant – aware
communicate – talk
compassion – pity
competent – able
completion - end, finish
conclusive – final
contact – call
contraceptive - birth control
contusion – bruise
conversion – change
coronary thrombosis - heart attack
correspond – agree
decrease - make less, reduce, lower
deficit – shortage
delete - strike out
demonstrate – show
detect – find
detrimental – harmful
develop - arise, occur
diagnosis - problem, condition
diminish - get less, slow down
discoloration - change in color
disconnect - undo
discontinue - stop
dressing - bandage
due to the fact that - because
dyspepsia - indigestion
 elevate - raise
 eliminate - get rid of
embolism - lump of blood, clot
encourage - urge
endeavor - try
difficulties - problems, trouble
excessive - too much
experience - feel
facilitate - help, ease
feasible - can be done
frequently - often
fundamental - basic
generate - produce
guarantee - backing, promise
hazardous - risky
humid - damp
humorous - funny
identical - same
illustration - picture
impair - harm
inadvertent - careless
inadvisable - unwise
incision - cut
incorrect - wrong
independent - free
indication - sign
ineffectual - useless
inform - tell
inhibit - check, hinder
initial - first
initiate - begin, start
injection - shot
innovation - change
instrument - tool
institute - set up
intention - aim
interrupt - stop
laceration - cut, tear
lenient - mild
locality - place
manifest - clear, plain
minimal - smallest
modification - change
nebulous - hazy, vague
notification - notice
numerate - count
nutrient - food
obligation - duty
observation - remark
observe - note
obvious - plain
occurrence - event
opportunity - chance
option - choice
palatable - pleasing
penetrate - pierce
perforation - hole
permission - consent
physician - doctor
present - give
principal - main, chief
project - plan
qualified - suited
recognize - know, accept
recover - get well
rehabilitate - restore
saturate - soak
scarlatina - scarlet fever
segment - part
sensation - feeling
several - many
severity - how bad
similar to - like

similarity - likeness
similar - like
situated - placed
status - state
stimulate - excite
sufficient - enough
sustenance - support
sutures - stitches
tear of ligament - sprain
technicality - detail
termination - end
therapy - treatment
ultimate - last, final
uncommonly - rarely
understand - know
unequivocal - clear
unfounded - groundless
unnecessary - needless
until such time - until
utilize - use
varicella - chicken pox
visualize - picture
voluminous - bulky