



French

Medical Translators

French Medical Translation: Essential French Medical Terms for UK Patients

A practical French → English guide to understanding French medical
documents

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French Medical Translators

Introduction

If you are a British patient receiving medical treatment in France, or you have French medical records that need to be understood in the UK, the terminology can sometimes feel confusing.

French medical documents contain a mixture of everyday medical vocabulary, specialist terminology, abbreviations and expressions that do not always translate literally into natural English.

This guide provides a selection of the most useful French medical terms you are likely to encounter in:

- French hospital records
- doctors' letters
- blood test results
- MRI, CT and X-ray reports
- prescriptions
- pathology and biopsy reports
- discharge summaries
- vaccination records
- specialist correspondence

It is designed particularly for **UK patients dealing with French healthcare documentation**.

An important point about translation

Knowing what an individual French medical word means is not the same as translating an entire medical document.

A professional medical translation needs to take account of the surrounding sentence, the medical specialty, abbreviations and the purpose of the document. In some cases, the most appropriate English equivalent is not the literal French equivalent.

For example, **bilan** can mean an assessment, work-up, investigation or panel depending on the context. Similarly, **service** in a French hospital may refer to a department or ward rather than a "service".

This is why medical translation requires both linguistic and subject-matter expertise.

General Medical Vocabulary

French	English
patient / patiente	patient
médecin	doctor / physician
médecin traitant	GP / primary care doctor
spécialiste	specialist
infirmier / infirmière	nurse
chirurgien	surgeon
consultation	consultation / appointment
rendez-vous	appointment
antécédents médicaux	medical history
antécédents familiaux	family history
symptômes	symptoms
diagnostic	diagnosis
traitement	treatment
suivi	follow-up / monitoring
ordonnance	prescription
médicament	medicine / medication
posologie	dosage / dosing instructions
contre-indication	contraindication
effet secondaire	side effect
allergie	allergy
hospitalisation	hospital admission
sortie	discharge
urgence	emergency

French	English
service des urgences	Emergency Department / A&E
dossier médical	medical record / medical file
examen	examination / test
résultat	result
avis médical	medical opinion
compte rendu	medical report
conclusion	conclusion / impression

A useful distinction: consultation and rendez-vous

Consultation usually refers to the medical consultation itself, while **rendez-vous** means an appointment. Depending on the context, a French medical document might therefore refer to the appointment, the consultation or the resulting written report.

Symptoms & Clinical Examination

French	English
douleur	pain
douleur abdominale	abdominal pain
douleur thoracique	chest pain
fièvre	fever
fatigue	fatigue / tiredness
essoufflement	shortness of breath
nausées	nausea
vomissements	vomiting
vertiges	dizziness
céphalées	headache
toux	cough
inflammation	inflammation
gonflement	swelling
œdème	oedema
perte de poids	weight loss
prise de poids	weight gain
perte d'appétit	loss of appetite
constipation	constipation
diarrhée	diarrhoea
saignement	bleeding
éruption cutanée	skin rash
démangeaisons	itching
examen clinique	clinical examination

French	English
tension artérielle	blood pressure
fréquence cardiaque	heart rate
fréquence respiratoire	respiratory rate
température	temperature
poids	weight
taille	height
saturation en oxygène	oxygen saturation

French → UK terminology

You may notice differences in spelling between French medical English and UK medical English.

For example:

œdème → oedema

hémoglobine → haemoglobin

tumeur → tumour

diarrhée → diarrhoea

anesthésie → anaesthesia

When translating medical documents for UK use, appropriate UK medical terminology and spelling should normally be used.

Blood Tests & Laboratory Results

Blood-test reports are among the most commonly translated French medical documents.

French	English
prise de sang	blood test / blood draw
analyse de sang	blood test / blood analysis
numération formule sanguine (NFS)	full blood count (FBC)
hémoglobine (Hb)	haemoglobin
globules rouges	red blood cells
globules blancs	white blood cells
plaquettes	platelets
ferritine	ferritin
fer	iron
glycémie	blood glucose
hémoglobine glyquée (HbA1c)	HbA1c / glycated haemoglobin
créatinine	creatinine
urée	urea
bilan hépatique	liver function tests / liver profile
bilan rénal	kidney function tests / renal profile
protéine C-réactive (CRP)	C-reactive protein
vitesse de sédimentation (VS)	erythrocyte sedimentation rate (ESR)
cholestérol	cholesterol
triglycérides	triglycerides
bilan lipidique	lipid profile
TSH	thyroid-stimulating hormone / TSH
coagulation	coagulation / clotting

French	English
groupe sanguin	blood group

What does “bilan” mean?

One of the most useful French medical words to recognise is **bilan**.

It does not have one single English translation.

Depending on the context, it can refer to:

- an assessment
- a medical work-up
- a panel of tests
- an investigation
- an evaluation

For example:

bilan hépatique → liver function tests

bilan rénal → kidney function tests

bilan lipidique → lipid profile

Context is essential.

Scans & Medical Imaging

French	English
imagerie médicale	medical imaging
radiographie	X-ray
échographie	ultrasound scan
scanner	CT scan
tomodensitométrie (TDM)	CT scan
IRM	MRI scan
mammographie	mammogram / mammography
échocardiographie	echocardiogram
électrocardiogramme (ECG)	ECG
radiologue	radiologist
compte rendu radiologique	radiology report
produit de contraste	contrast medium
injection	injection
lésion	lesion
nodule	nodule
masse	mass
anomalie	abnormality
examen normal	normal examination
sans anomalie	no abnormality
à contrôler	to be monitored / follow-up recommended
à comparer aux examens antérieurs	to be compared with previous examinations

Common French imaging abbreviations

IRM = imagerie par résonance magnétique → MRI

TDM = tomodensitométrie → CT

ECG = électrocardiogramme → ECG

A French **compte rendu d'IRM** is generally an **MRI report**, rather than an “MRI account”.

Pathology, Biopsy & Oncology

Pathology reports require particular care because they can contain highly specialised terminology.

French	English
anatomopathologie	histopathology / anatomical pathology
compte rendu anatomopathologique	histopathology report
biopsie	biopsy
prélèvement	sample / specimen
histologie	histology
cytologie	cytology
tumeur	tumour
carcinome	carcinoma
bénin	benign
malin	malignant
grade	grade
stade	stage
marges d'exérèse	surgical / resection margins
immunohistochimie	immunohistochemistry
récepteurs hormonaux	hormone receptors
récepteur aux œstrogènes (RE)	oestrogen receptor (ER)
récepteur à la progestérone (RP)	progesterone receptor (PR)
HER2	HER2
Ki-67	Ki-67
métastase	metastasis
ganglion lymphatique	lymph node



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French	English
chimiothérapie	chemotherapy
radiothérapie	radiotherapy
hormonothérapie	hormone / endocrine therapy

Why pathology translation requires specialist knowledge

A pathology report may contain information about tumour type, grade, stage, margins and receptor status. A small translation error can potentially alter the meaning of clinically important information.

For this reason, pathology reports should not be treated as ordinary general-language documents.

Prescriptions & Medication

French	English
ordonnance	prescription
médicament	medicine / medication
nom commercial	brand name / trade name
DCI	INN / international nonproprietary name
principe actif	active ingredient
dose	dose
posologie	dosage / dosing instructions
voie orale	oral route
voie intraveineuse (IV)	intravenous
voie intramusculaire (IM)	intramuscular
voie sous-cutanée (SC)	subcutaneous
comprimé	tablet
gélule	capsule
sirop	syrup
crème	cream
pommade	ointment
gouttes	drops
matin	morning
midi	midday
soir	evening
au coucher	at bedtime
à jeun	fasting / on an empty stomach
renouvellement	repeat prescription / renewal

One important point

French medicine names can differ from the names familiar to British patients. The **active ingredient** is therefore often particularly important when interpreting a French prescription.

A professional translation should reproduce the information accurately and should not introduce assumptions about an equivalent UK product unless this is specifically required and clinically appropriate.

French Hospital Terminology

French	English
hôpital	hospital
clinique	clinic / private hospital
service	department / ward
service de médecine	medical department
service de chirurgie	surgical department
consultation externe	outpatient clinic
hospitalisation complète	inpatient admission
hospitalisation de jour	day-case / day hospital
admission	admission
sortie	discharge
lettre de sortie	discharge letter
compte rendu d'hospitalisation	hospital discharge summary / hospital report
compte rendu opératoire	operative report / operation note
bloc opératoire	operating theatre
anesthésie générale	general anaesthesia
anesthésie locale	local anaesthesia
intervention	procedure / operation
réanimation	intensive care / resuscitation, depending on context
soins intensifs	intensive care
ambulance	ambulance

“Clinique” does not always mean “clinic”

This is a particularly important example for British patients.

In France, **clinique** can refer to a private healthcare establishment or private hospital. Translating it automatically as “clinic” may therefore give a UK reader the wrong impression of the type of institution involved.

Common French Medical Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
ATCD	antécédents — medical history
ATCDM	antécédents médicaux — medical history
TA	tension artérielle — blood pressure
FC	fréquence cardiaque — heart rate
FR	fréquence respiratoire — respiratory rate
T°	température — temperature
SpO ₂	saturation en oxygène — oxygen saturation
NFS	numération formule sanguine — FBC
VS	vitesse de sédimentation — ESR
CRP	protéine C-réactive — CRP
IRM	imagerie par résonance magnétique — MRI
TDM	tomodensitométrie — CT
ECG	électrocardiogramme — ECG
IV	intraveineux — intravenous
IM	intramusculaire — intramuscular
SC	sous-cutané — subcutaneous
RCP	réunion de concertation pluridisciplinaire — multidisciplinary team meeting
ALD	affection de longue durée — long-term condition within the French healthcare system

Why abbreviations matter

French medical abbreviations can be particularly difficult for English-speaking patients because the letters do not necessarily correspond to the English terminology.

For example:

NFS is the French abbreviation for *numération formule sanguine*, whereas the UK equivalent is generally **FBC — full blood count**.

Useful Phrases in French Medical Reports

French	Typical English rendering
état général conservé	general condition is good / preserved
état général altéré	general condition is impaired
absence de	absence of / no evidence of
sans signe de	with no sign of
en faveur de	suggestive of / in keeping with
compatible avec	compatible with / consistent with
évoquant	suggestive of / raising the possibility of
à discuter	to be discussed / considered
à compléter par	to be supplemented by / followed up with
à surveiller	to be monitored
à revoir	to be reviewed / reassessed
sous traitement	on treatment
bonne tolérance	well tolerated
évolution favorable	favourable progress / improvement
évolution défavorable	unfavourable progress / deterioration
sans particularité	unremarkable / no significant abnormality
bilan	assessment / work-up / panel
conclusion	conclusion / impression

French Terms That Can Mislead UK Patients

médecin traitant

Usually the doctor responsible for coordinating a patient's care within the French healthcare system. It is often rendered as **GP** or **primary care doctor** for a UK audience, although the French and British healthcare systems are not identical.

compte rendu

A formal written report. Depending on the context, it might be a consultation report, radiology report, operative report or hospital report.

service

In a hospital, this commonly means a **department** or **ward**.

ordonnance

Usually a **prescription**, although the document can contain several medicines and treatment instructions.

sortie

In a hospital context, this normally means **discharge**, rather than simply “exit”.

bilan

A broad medical term that can mean an assessment, work-up, investigation or panel depending on context.

récidive

This may mean **recurrence** or, in certain contexts, **relapse**. It should not automatically be translated as “relapse” without considering the medical context.

French & UK Healthcare: A Few Differences

Patients moving between France and the UK may encounter terminology that reflects two different healthcare systems.

For example, the French healthcare system commonly uses terms such as:

médecin traitant

affection de longue durée (ALD)

carte Vitale

mutuelle

ordonnance

hospitalisation de jour

These terms do not always have an exact one-to-one equivalent in the NHS.

This is another reason that **context matters when translating medical documents**.

A good medical translation should communicate the meaning clearly to the intended English-speaking reader while remaining faithful to the original French document.

When Do You Need a Professional Translation?

A vocabulary guide can be useful when you want to understand a few words on a document.

However, you may need a professional translation when:

- your UK doctor needs to review French medical records;
- you are changing healthcare providers;
- you need to provide French records to an NHS or private hospital;
- you are submitting medical evidence to an insurer;
- you need a translated prescription;
- you are seeking a second medical opinion;
- you are applying for a medical or insurance-related benefit;
- you need pathology or oncology reports translated;
- you have a large French medical file;
- the receiving organisation specifically requests a certified translation.

Ask the recipient first

Before ordering a translation, ask the organisation receiving the document:

Does it need to be certified?

Does it need the original formatting retained?

Is there a particular deadline?

Does the organisation have any specific translation requirements?

This can prevent delays and unnecessary expense.

About French Medical Translators

Specialist French → English Medical Translation

French Medical Translators provides specialist French → English medical translation for patients, families, healthcare professionals and organisations.

Documents can include:

Medical records · doctors' letters · hospital discharge summaries · blood test results · MRI reports · CT reports · mammography reports · pathology reports · biopsy reports · prescriptions · vaccination records · specialist correspondence

The emphasis is on **accurate human translation, appropriate medical terminology and careful reproduction of the source document's structure and formatting.**

About Andrew Simpson

Andrew Simpson is a **Chartered Linguist and Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Linguists**, specialising in French → English translation.



His professional background includes extensive experience working between France and the UK, together with a degree in Computer Science, which provides an additional strength in document formatting and DTP.

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