# Using Articles in Medical Writing

| Situation | Sample sentence | Commentary |
|---|---|---|
| **organs** | *The* **spleen** is an organ that plays a role in immunity. | The definite article is used before organs, even during the initial mention. Since there is only one spleen, it is definite. |
| | *The* **lungs** transfer oxygen into the blood | The definite article is used even when the organ is in the plural. The organ is considered singular in meaning. |
| | *The* right **lung** is infected. | In this case, "lung" is clearly definite; there is only one right lung. |
| | **Arteries** are vessels that carry blood high in oxygen content away from the heart to the farthest reaches of the body. OR *An* **artery** is a vessel that carries blood . . . | Cells, vessels, pimples, boils do not automatically take a definite article since there are more than one of them in the body. |
| **system of the body** | *The* **lymphatic system** plays an important role in immunity. | Systems of the body are definite (there is only one lymphatic system) and thus treated like organs are. |
| **noncount only** | a) **Blood** is difficult to remove from clothing. | Here "blood" is considered non-count, a substance like "sugar." |
| | b) *The* **blood** carries oxygen to all parts of the body. | Here "blood" is considered an organ. |
| | c) The hospital finally received more Type O <u>blood</u>. *The* **blood** was delivered yesterday. | SInce blood has been mentioned in the first sentence, it is now (at second mention) considered definite. |
| | d) **Aspirin** is generally prescribed. **But** The cat ate <u>the **aspirin** that I left on the counter</u>. | **Names of drugs** are considered **noncount,** so no article is required when indefinite. However, in the second instance, "aspirin" is made definite by the following clause. |
| | e) **Cancer** claims many lives. | **Diseases** are, in most cases, **noncount** and generally do not take an article. |
| **count and noncount meanings** | a) **Treatment** is given in the hospital. | Treatment is used as a noncount noun here and is indefinite. . |
| | b) Breast cancer victims must have radiation treatment. *The* **treatment** is given in the hospital. | Here, "treatment" is also used in the abstract at first mention and is indefinite. At second mention, the noncount noun becomes definite. |
| | c) Breast cancer victims must have numerous radiation **treatments**. | "Treatment" here is used in a count sense so the plural form is used. No article when indefinite. |
| | d) Breast cancer victims require radiation **treatments**. *The* **treatments** are given in the hospital. | After the first mention of treatments, the noun becomes definite. |
| | e) Radiation is *a* common **treatment** for breast cancer, but the patient has other options as well. | Here, "treatment" is used in the count sense (one of a few types of treatment) and is singular. |

| count nouns: *plural* | a) **Injections** for diabetes are usually given subcutaneously. *The* i**njections** are painless. | **Plural count nouns** do not take articles when they are indefinite. However, at second mention they become definite and do take the definite article. |
|---|---|---|
| | b) **Anti-inflammatories** are drugs that reduce swelling. BUT c) The doctor prescribed *an* **anti-inflammatory**. | Classes of drugs are considered count nouns and are expressed in the plural with no article when speaking of them in general. In "c," the count from is used with an indefinite article to mean one type of anti-inflammatory drug. |
| | d) *An* **anti-inflammatory** is a type of drug that reduces swelling. | Plural count nouns are often expressed as singular in a definition. "b" and "d" mean the same. |
| count nouns: *singular* | a) Fever is *a* (common) **symptom** associated with chicken pox. b) Fever is *one of the* **symptoms** associated with chicken pox. | Use the indefinite article for a count noun when the situation is not definite The meaning here is that there are other symptoms. Think of "one of the + plural noun" as an expression. Means the same as "a'" above |
| Noun made definite by qualifying phrase | *The* **prevalence of gout** is equal in men and women. *The* **ingestion of certain drugs** may also cause this condition. | Noncount noun made more specific with a prepositional phrase takes the definite article, "the." |
| superlative | *The* **most obvious symptom** is the rash, which appears after 10 days. | When using a superlative "the biggest, "the worst," etc., the definite article is always used. |
| generic reference | a) *The* **patient** is generally given acetaminophen to relieve pain. b) **Patients** are generally given acetaminophen to relieve pain. | The meaning in A versus B is pretty much the same; both mean "patients in general." |

## COUNT AND NONCOUNT FORMS:

**medication**, as in Medication is an important aspect of treatment.
OR
**medications**, as in Medications include analgesics and antibiotics. (means types of medication)

**treatment**, as in Treatment cannot cure the disease but can help relieve symptoms.
OR
**treatments,** as in The patient underwent seven radiation treatments.

**pain** (usually); pains (sometimes), as in old age involves many aches and pains

**fever**, as in Fever is a common symptom.
BUT
The patient is running a fever.

## NON-COUNT NOUNS (always)

**states**: inflammation, consciousness, stupor, anxiety, emotions (anger, etc.)

**conditions** (may exist alone as a disorder or as part of a disorder): hyperacidity, hypotension, insomnia, indigestion,