Physician’s Lexicon
The Epi- Words of Medicine

An episode—currently meaning an incident or a specified interval of time—originates from the Greek, episodion, a noun meaning ‘coming in’, or ‘beside’. It stems earlier from the Greek, eidoses, meaning ‘an entrance’ or ‘an arrival’; and still earlier from the Greek, bodos, meaning ‘a pathway’. A medical episode, hence, conveys a narrower meaning: a happening, often quite brief, of pathological significance (e.g., an episode of fainting).

An epidemic (a Greek noun, epidemia) means, literally, ‘that which is among’, or ‘upon the people’ and, inferentially, a communicable disease.

The epiglottis, the cartilagenus triangle at the base of the tongue, is a word of Greek origin compounding the prefix, epi-, and the root glossa, meaning tongue. Glossa has also given rise to terms such as glossary, thus using the metaphorical meaning of the word, tongue, to signify a language (as in English, “He speaks in many tongues.”) Related words include hypoglossal, pangloss, polyglot, glosso-tomy and glottis.

The hormone, epinephrine, translates as ‘upon the kidney’, and the Latin equivalent would be ‘adrenal.’

Epistaxis, a bleeding, inferentially, from the nose, comes from the Greek root, stasis, meaning ‘a standing’ or ‘a falling’. A similar word, epistasis, in genetics means the dominance of one gene over another (i.e., one gene standing over another).

And amongst the many ‘epi-’ words there is EPCOT, a Disney theme park in Orlando, Florida, and a center of great revelation. It represents an acronym for Experimental Prototype of Tomorrow.

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