

Generative AI: A simple glossary

Generative AI

A type of computer technology that creates new content, like written answers, summaries, or lists, based on what you ask it.

AI tool (or AI assistant)

A program such as ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, or Perplexity that uses generative AI to respond to questions typed by a user.

Prompt

The question or instruction you type into an AI tool. Clear, simple prompts usually lead to more helpful answers.

Large language model

The technology behind AI tools that helps them guess what words should come next. It does not think or understand like a person.

Training data

Examples of text and information that AI tools learn from. This helps them spot patterns, but it does not mean the information is always correct.

Context

Extra details you include to help the AI understand your question. Adding context can help, but you should avoid sharing private or sensitive health information.

Summary

A shorter, organized version of information, such as a list of symptoms or questions, created to make things easier to understand.

Hallucination

When an AI tool gives an answer that sounds confident but is wrong or made up. This is why AI answers should be double-checked.

Confidence vs. accuracy

AI tools may sound sure of themselves even when they are incorrect. A confident answer is not always a correct one.

Verification

Checking AI information with a trusted source, such as your doctor or care team, before acting on it.

HIPAA

A U.S. law that protects your medical information when handled by doctors and insurance companies. Most public AI tools are not covered by HIPAA.

AI as a support tool

Using AI to help organize thoughts, prepare questions, or better understand information—not to replace a doctor's advice or medical care.