

Vital Signs

Learner Workbook



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VITAL SIGNS

Are you expected to take vital signs? If so, this course is designed to help train you the appropriate techniques. During the video provided with this course, Sandi Flores, RN reviews step-by-step procedures for taking blood pressure, temperature, pulse, respirations, and weight. We will also address documenting and reporting vital signs.

Vital signs include the reading of:

- Temperature
- Pulse
- Respirations
- Blood pressure

Temperature

According to American Medical Association, normal body temperature equals between 97.8°F - 99°F.

Fever is defined as an abnormal body temperature for that resident.

- Infection can cause a fever.
- It is important never to measure the severity of the illness based solely on the temperature reading.

Oral temperature:

- Glass thermometer – never use a glass thermometer on a resident with impulse control issue or confusion.

Let's discuss how to take a temperature reading:

- Make sure nothing hot or cold has been in the resident's mouth for 10 minutes
- Use the manufacturer's recommend probe covers
- Ask the resident to open their mouth
- Hold the thermometer under the tongue
- Remind resident to keep lips closed
- Wait for the beep

- Read the number in the window
- Document and report
- Disinfect
- Follow manufacturer's instructions

How to take a glass thermometer temperature reading:

- Make sure nothing hot or cold has been in the resident's mouth for 10 minutes
- Inspect the thermometer for any nicks or cracks
- Always hold at the end opposite the metal tip
- Clean the thermometer with rubbing alcohol and rinse with cold water
- Find colored line
- Should read less than 96°F
- Shake down the thermometer if too high
- Ask the resident to open their mouth
- Hold the thermometer under the tongue
- Remind resident to keep lips closed and not to bite down
- Keep under tongue for 3 minutes
- Remove without touching tip
- Wipe to remove excess saliva
- Find line and read temperature
- Long line = 1°F Short lines = 0.2°F
- Document and report
- Disinfect
- Follow manufacturer's instructions

How to take a tympanic (ear) thermometer temperature reading:

- Follow manufacturer's instructions
- Use the manufacturer's recommend probe covers
- Gently pull ear up and back
- Insert thermometer into ear canal
- Press button and wait for beep
- Remove and read temperature
- Document and report
- Remove and discard plastic cover
- Remember to always follow manufacturer's instructions

How to take a rectal temperature reading:

- Always receive resident specific training from a medical professional before performing a rectal temperature reading
- Follow your state regulations

Pulse

Rate equals beats per minute.

“Normal” Rate equals 60-100.

Report abnormal vital signs immediately. An abnormal pulse accompanied by other signs or symptoms can be a medical emergency.

How to take a pulse reading:

- Feel between the bone and tendon at the wrist
- Use tips of index and middle fingers
- Count the beats for one minute
- If unsure, get another opinion
- Document and report
- Never press too hard
- Never use your thumb

Respirations

“Normal” respirations equals 15-20 breaths per minute.

Simply watch the chest and count how many respirations take place in one minute. Try to count respirations directly after a pulse reading.

Pressure Reading

You will need a stethoscope and blood pressure cuff (sphygmomanometer)

Two numbers are recorded:

- Diastolic number is the lower number when the heart contracts
- Diastolic number is the lower number when the heart is at rest

Normal blood pressure is less than 120 systolic pressure and less than 80 diastolic pressure.

High blood pressure = hypertension

Low blood pressure = hypotension

How to take a blood pressure reading:

- Roll up or remove sleeve
- Place cuff on upper arm
- Center over brachial artery
- Put the gauge in a secure location
- Arm should be at heart level
- Close the valve
- Inflate to 180 mm Hg or higher, if necessary
- Deflate slowly
- First sound is systolic pressure
- When sound fades, that is diastolic pressure
- If you were unable to obtain a reading, reattempt after 1 minute on the opposite arm
- Do not attempt to take blood pressure on an arm that is injured or has a wound

Weight

Weight is not considered a vital sign but is important to monitor. Consistency is the key.

- Remove shoes
- Use the same scale when possible
- Place scale on firm ground
- Ensure resident is steady
- Use a wheelchair scale if necessary
- Adjust large weight first
- Adjust fine balance with smaller weight