



Expert in my pocket

VITAL SIGNS

Vital Signs



1 Preparing for the procedure

- a. Perform hand hygiene.
- b. Introduce self and obtain verbal consent.
- c. Plug in automatic blood pressure machine.
- d. Ensure sensor probe is connected to pulse oximeter.
- e. Ensure sufficient battery charge of all equipment prior to patient use; alternatively, ensure machine is plugged into wall outlet.



2 Performing the procedure

Taking blood pressure

- a. Apply blood pressure cuff.
- b. Apply pulse oximeter probe to finger on opposite arm.
- c. Turn on automatic blood pressure monitor and press start.
- d. Read result.



Taking temperature (using temporal artery thermometer)

- a. Depress and hold down button while running probe across patient's forehead.
- b. Keep button depressed while pressing probe against neck, just behind ear lobe.
- c. Release the button.
- d. Read temperature.



Checking pulse rate

- a. Use two or three middle fingertips to locate the pulse at radial artery.
- b. Lightly hold your fingers over the pulse.
- c. Using the second hand on a clock, count the beat for a full minute.
- d. Note pulse characteristics including rhythm and strength.



Counting respiratory rate

- a. Cross patient's arm over chest OR place hand on patient shoulder.
- b. Feel chest rise and fall with hand, counting each inspiration/expiration cycle as one respiration.
- c. Using the second hand on a clock, count respirations for a full minute.
- d. Note characteristics or respirations including rhythm and depth.



3 Documentation

- a. Document all relevant information on patient's observation chart.
- b. Report abnormal findings.

Background

Approximately 70-80% adverse events are preceded by derangements in vital signs for up to 12 hours with minimal or no intervention from clinicians. This emphasises the need for health professionals to ensure patient safety by careful patient assessment. Recognition and managing the deteriorating patient is one of the Australian National and Quality Health Service Standards developed by the Australian Commission on Quality and Safety in Health care in 2011.

Equipment required

- Hand sanitiser
- Automatic blood pressure machine with blood pressure cuff
- Pulse oximeter and sensor probe
- Thermometer

References

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC) (September 2011), National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards, ACSQHC, Sydney
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