

Mosby's Nursing Video Skills

Procedure Guideline for Assessing Apical-Radial Pulse

1. Verify the health care provider's orders.
2. Gather the necessary equipment and supplies.
3. Perform hand hygiene.
4. Introduce yourself to the patient and family if present.
5. Provide for the patient's privacy.
6. Identify the patient using two patient identifiers.
7. Check for factors that suggest a possible pulse deficit, such as an irregular heart rate, dyspnea, fatigue, chest pain, orthopnea, or palpitations. Obtain the help of a second health care provider.
8. Explain to the patient that two people will be assessing heart function at the same time. Help the patient into a supine or sitting position, and expose the sternum and the left side of the chest.
9. Locate the apical and radial pulse sites. If possible, have the second health care provider palpate the radial pulse while you auscultate the apical pulse.
10. When the person holding the watch says "Start," both of you should begin counting the pulse rate simultaneously for a full 60 seconds.
11. When the person holding the watch says "Stop," stop counting and compare your findings.
12. Subtract the radial rate from the apical rate. If the difference is more than 2 beats per minute, a pulse deficit exists, reflecting the number of ineffective cardiac contractions in 1 minute.
13. Help the patient into a comfortable position. Discuss your findings with the patient as needed.
14. Perform hand hygiene.
15. As part of your follow-up care for a patient with a pulse deficit, assess for other signs and symptoms of decreased cardiac output, such as edema of dependent body parts, cyanosis or pallor of the skin, and dizziness or syncope.

16. Report the presence of a pulse deficit and any related symptoms to the nurse in charge or to the health care provider.
17. Help the patient into a comfortable position, and place toiletries and personal items within reach.
18. Place the call light within easy reach, and make sure the patient knows how to use it to summon assistance.
19. To ensure the patient's safety, raise the appropriate number of side rails and lower the bed to the lowest position.
20. Dispose of used supplies and equipment. Leave the patient's room tidy.
21. Remove and dispose of gloves, if used. Perform hand hygiene.
22. Document and report the patient's response and expected or unexpected outcomes.