Procedural Guideline for Assessing Radial Pulse

1. Verify the health care provider’s orders.
2. Gather the necessary equipment and supplies.
3. Perform hand hygiene.
4. Provide for the patient’s privacy.
5. Introduce yourself to the patient and family if present.
6. Identify the patient using two patient identifiers.
7. Assess for factors that can affect pulse rate and rhythm, such as medical history, disease processes, age, exercise, and medications.
8. Use gloves if you will be in contact with bodily fluids or if the patient is in protective precautions.
9. Help the patient into a supine or sitting position. If the patient is supine, place the forearm along the side, with the wrist extended straight, or place the patient’s forearm across the chest or upper abdomen.
10. If the patient is sitting, bend the elbow 90 degrees and support the lower arm on the chair or on your arm. Slightly extend or flex the wrist, with the palm down.
11. Place your first two or middle three fingertips over the groove along the thumb side of the patient’s inner wrist. Slightly extend or flex the wrist, with palm down, until you note the strongest pulse.
12. Press against the radius, obliterating the pulse at first and then relaxing the pressure until the pulse is readily palpable.
13. Rate the strength of the pulse, determining whether the thrust of the vessel against your fingertips is bounding; full or strong; barely palpable or diminished; or absent, not palpable.
14. Note the regularity of the rate and rhythm. Once you can feel the pulse consistently, look at your watch. When the second hand reaches a number on the dial (or when the digital display reaches a round number), start taking the pulse, counting the first beat you feel as “one.”
   A. For a regular pulse, count the rate for 30 seconds and multiply the total by 2. The pulse rate normally ranges from 60 to 100 beats per minute.
   B. For an irregular pulse, count the pulse rate for a full 60 seconds. Note the frequency and pattern of the irregularity, and compare the radial pulses bilaterally. Assess for a pulse deficit.
15. Help the patient into a comfortable position, and place toiletries and personal items within reach.
16. Place the call light within easy reach, and make sure the patient knows how to use it to summon assistance.
17. To ensure the patient’s safety, raise the appropriate number of side rails and lower the bed to the lowest position.
18. Dispose of used supplies and equipment. Leave the patient’s room tidy.
19. Remove and dispose of gloves, if used. Perform hand hygiene.
20. Discuss your findings with the patient as needed.
21. As part of your follow-up, compare the patient’s pulse rate and character with the
baseline and with the acceptable range for the patient’s age.
22. Document and report the patient’s response and expected or unexpected outcomes.