

## Taking a Pulse

1. It is best to take a pulse when the person has been sitting or lying down for 15 minutes, such as when he or she first wakes up in the morning.
2. Take a pulse when the person tells you he or she “feels funny”, is having chest pain or pressure in the chest, or notices a flutter or missed beat.
3. Learn what the person’s resting heart rate is, so you are able to see how they react to activity or medicines.
4. Be sure you have a watch with a second hand or a digital second count. You can also use a wall clock with a second hand to count a pulse.
5. Wash your hands for 15 seconds, rinse and dry your hands.
6. Have the person lay down or sit up in a chair or the bed.
7. **Radial Pulse**
  - a. If the person is lying down, place their arm straight down along their body or you can place one arm across the lower chest or upper abdomen.
  - b. If the person is sitting, bend the elbow 90 degrees and allow their arm to rest on the arm of the chair, on your arm, across their lap, or support the lower arm on a pillow while you take their pulse.
  - c. When the arm is relaxed it is easier to find the pulse.
  - d. Place the tips of your first two fingers over what is called the radial groove. The groove is along the thumb side of the wrist between the hard tendon and long bone of the lower arm. There, you will feel a soft spot, where the radial artery is located.
  - e. You will feel the pulse wave or throbbing sensation against your fingers
  - f. Do not use your thumb to check the pulse. If you do you will feel your own pulse.
  - g. It helps to extend the person’s wrist just a bit with their palm side down to make it easier to feel the pulse.
  - h. Press lightly but firmly enough to feel a pulse. The wave of the pulse will push against your fingertips and feel like a light tap.
  - i. Take time to notice the rhythm and the strength of the pulse against your fingers – does the pulse push strong against your fingertips or is it weak, thready (faint), and hard to feel?
  - j. If you cannot feel the pulse, you might be pressing too hard.
  - k. Once you feel a pulse, look at your watch or a clock in the room. Be sure to only use a watch or clock with a second hand. It is very important that the pulse rate is accurate
  - l. Count the first pulse beat after the second hand hits 12 on the watch dial or the digital clock changes a minute. Count the beats for 60 seconds.
  - m. If the pulse is regular and you feel comfortable taking the pulse, count for 30 seconds and multiply the rate by 2. For example, if you count 36 beats in 30 seconds, the pulse rate is 72 per minute.

- n. Remember, when counting the pulse do not watch the clock continuously, but think about the beats of the pulse so that you count the right rate. This helps you to note an irregular or weak pulse.
- o. Compare the pulse rate to the person's previous heart rate. Remember: The "*normal*" range is about 70 to 80 beats, but can range from 60 to 100 beats per minute.
- p. Keep a diary of the person's pulse rates, especially if you measure them several times a day. Write a note about how the pulse felt and whether it was regular or not. Compare the rate with the last rate you measured. Note if the pulse has changed or is abnormal in any way.

#### 8. **Carotid Pulse**

- a. To feel the carotid pulse, place the tips of your index and middle fingers on the bottom half of the person's Adam's Apple. Gently slide your fingers outward and into the groove next to the Adam's Apple until you feel the pulsing sensation of the carotid artery.
- b. Once you feel a regular pulse, count it for 30 seconds as you did with the radial pulse. Multiply by 2 to get the rate per minute.
- c. If you need to take the carotid pulse on both sides, check them one at a time. Never massage or check both sides of the neck at the same time. This can cause a lack of blood flow to the brain and cause an abnormal slowing of the heart rate.

Remember, whenever you feel a pulse that is much slower or faster than what is normal for the person you care for or if it is irregular, call the person's doctor.