Respiration and Pulse

Locations for Pulse

A medical assistant can measure a patient’s pulse in several different areas of the body, depending on the location of the arteries. Some of them are more commonly used than others. They are the following:

- Radial—located on the thumb side of the wrist
- Carotid—located on either side of the neck
- Brachial—located on the inner portion of the arm, best felt at the antecubital space (elbow)
- Temporal—located on the face at the temple
- Femoral—located in the groin area on the upper thigh of either leg
- Popliteal—located behind the knee of either leg
- Dorsalis pedis—located on the top of either foot
- Apical—located directly over the heart, the fifth intercostal space on the chest

To correctly measure the pulse, the medical assistant should count the number of beats felt. The time factor depends on the medical assistant. You can count for 15 seconds and multiply by four, or count for 30 seconds and multiply by two, or count for one whole minute. If the patient is complaining of chest pain, the medical assistant should measure for a full minute. Rate, rhythm, and the volume of the heartbeat are also assessed while taking a patient’s pulse.

When taking an infant’s pulse, the medical assistant will use the brachial area or apical area to obtain a measurement.
The normal respiration rate for an adult is between 14–20 breaths per minute. Newborns have a rate of 30–60 breaths per minute. Infants have 24–40 breaths per minute, and children ages 1–7 have a rate of 22–34 breaths per minute.

Which pulse site is widely used by medical assistants?

Medical assistants typically use the radial pulse to measure the pulse rate of a patient.

Locations for Respirations

The correct procedure to measure respiration is to keep your fingers on the pulse site and begin to count the respirations. Watching a patient breathe should be done without his or her knowledge. If a patient knows you are taking his or her respiration, readings may be incorrect. You should look for the patient’s thoracic cavity rising or expanding when he or she breathes in. The medical assistant will count how many times the patient breathes in one minute. The medical assistant can do this for 15 seconds and multiply by four, 30 seconds and multiply by two, or for a full minute. If the patient is complaining of shortness of breath, the medical assistant should take the respirations for a full minute. The medical assistant also assesses rate, rhythm, and volume of breaths during this process.

The trick to taking a patient’s respiration is to measure it immediately after taking the patient’s pulse.