

Procedure #7: Assessing Respirations

PURPOSES

- To acquire baseline data against which future measurements can be compared
- To monitor abnormal respirations and respiratory patterns and identify changes
- To monitor respirations before or after the administration of a general anesthetic or any medication that influences respirations
- To monitor clients at risk for respiratory alterations (e.g., those with fever, pain, acute anxiety, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, respiratory infection, pulmonary edema or emboli, chest trauma or constriction, brainstem injury)

Equipment

Clock or watch with a sweep second hand or digital seconds indicator

Preparation

For a routine assessment of respirations, determine the client's activity schedule and choose a suitable time to monitor the respirations. A client who has been exercising will need to rest for a few minutes to permit the accelerated respiratory rate to return to normal.

Performance

1. Prior to performing the procedure, introduce self and verify

the client's identity using agency protocol. Explain to the client

what you are going to do, why it is necessary, and how he or

she can participate. Discuss how the results will be used in

planning further care or treatments.

2. Perform hand hygiene and observe appropriate infection prevention procedures.

3. Provide for client privacy.

4. Observe or palpate and count the respiratory rate.

- The client's awareness that the nurse is counting the respiratory rate could cause the client to purposefully alter the respiratory pattern. If you anticipate this, place a hand against the client's chest to feel the chest movements with breathing, or place the client's arm across the chest and observe the chest movements while supposedly taking the radial pulse.
- Count the respiratory rate for 30 seconds if the respirations are regular. Count for 60 seconds if they are irregular. An inhalation and an exhalation count as one respiration.
- 5. Observe the depth, rhythm, and character of respirations.
 - Observe the respirations for depth by watching the movement of the chest.
 - Observe the respirations for regular or irregular rhythm
 - Observe the character of respirations—the sound they produce and the effort they require.



6. Document the respiratory rate, depth, rhythm, and character on the appropriate record

SAMPLE DOCUMENTATION

5/17/16 1320 Respirations irregular, from 18–34/min in past hour. Shallower respirations during tachypnea. Inspiratory wheeze noted. Respiratory therapist called to provide treatment. _____
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