Chapter 38

Assisting With a General Physical Examination

PowerPoint® presentation to accompany:

Medical Assisting
Third Edition

Booth, Whicker, Wyman, Pugh, Thompson
Learning Outcomes

38.1 State the purpose of a general physical examination.

38.2 Describe the role of the medical assistant in a general physical examination.

38.3 Explain safety precautions used during a general physical examination.

38.4 Outline the steps necessary to prepare the patient for an examination.
Learning Outcomes (cont.)

38.5 Describe how to position and drape a patient in each of the ten common examination positions.

38.6 Explain ways to assist patients from different cultures, patients with disabilities, pediatric patients, and pregnant women.

38.7 Identify and describe the six examination methods used in a general physical examination.

38.8 List the components of a general physical examination.
Learning Outcomes (cont.)

38.9 Explain and perform the procedures for vision screenings.

38.10 Explain and perform the procedures for hearing screenings.

38.11 Explain the special needs of the elderly for patient education.

38.12 Identify ways to help a patient follow up on a doctor’s recommendations.
Introduction

- You must make the client comfortable and assist the physician during the physical examination.

- Physical examination is the first step in the process for the physician.

A skilled medical assistant can create an atmosphere that results in a positive outcome for the patient during the physical examination.
Purpose of General Physical Examination

- To confirm an overall state of health
  - Baseline values for vital signs

- To diagnose a medical problem
  - Usually focuses on organ system based on patient’s chief complaint
Purpose of General Physical Examination (cont.)

- Clinical diagnosis
  - Based on signs and symptoms of a disease
    - Sign – objective information that can be detected
    - Symptom – subjective information from the patient
  - Laboratory and diagnostic tests
    - Confirm clinical diagnosis
    - Aid in forming differential diagnosis
    - Aid in developing a prognosis
    - Formulate a treatment plan and/or drug therapy
Role of Medical Assistant

- Enable the doctor to perform an effective examination
- Contribute to patient confidence in care
  - Physical and emotional comfort

Tasks
- Interview
- Write an accurate history
- Determine vital signs and measure weight and height
- Assist with examination

Your responsibilities include ensuring that all instruments and supplies are readily available to the doctor during the examination.
Apply Your Knowledge

What are two purposes for a general physical examination? Describe the role the medical assistant plays in this exam.

**ANSWER:** A physical examination is used to confirm the patient’s overall state of health or to diagnose a medical problem. The medical assistant’s role includes putting the patient at ease, performing the initial interview, documenting the patient history, taking vital signs and body measurements, assisting the physician in the exam, and making sure instruments and supplies are available for the exam.
Safety Precautions

- OSHA standards and guidelines
  - Protect employee
  - Make workplace safe

- CDC guidelines
  - Protect patients and health-care workers
Safety Precautions (cont.)

- **Hand washing**
  - Before and after each patient contact
  - Before and after each procedure

- **Wear gloves if there is probability of contact with**
  - Blood
  - Body fluids
  - Nonintact skin
  - Moist surfaces
Safety Precautions (cont.)

- Wear a mask if there is any possibility of exposure to an infectious disease transmitted by airborne droplets

- Isolation precautions
  - Personal protective equipment
  - Keep patients with possible infections separated from other patients
Safety Precautions (cont.)

- Discard all disposable equipment and supplies appropriately
- Clean and disinfect the exam room after each patient
- Sanitize, disinfect, and sterilize equipment appropriately
Mrs. Jefferson brings her daughter, Laura, to the office because of what she describes as an upper respiratory infection. Laura is coughing and the medical assistant notices a blister-like rash on her arms. What actions should the medical assistant take?

**ANSWER:** Laura most likely has chickenpox. She and her mother should be moved away from other patients in the waiting room to a private area. Since chickenpox is spread by droplet, the medical assistant and physician should wear a mask and gloves when in the room. In addition, the room should be cleaned and sanitized following the appointment.
Preparing the Patient for an Examination

- Emotional – explain exactly what will occur

- Physical – offer the bathroom and instruct the patient on how to disrobe and don an exam gown

- Positioning and draping – help patient assume needed exam position and drape to provide privacy
Preparing the Patient for an Examination: *Positioning and Draping*

- Positions facilitate physician’s examination
  - Assist the patient to appropriate position
  - Make as comfortable as possible
  - Cover with appropriate drape
    - Keep patient warm
    - Maintain privacy / modesty
Preparing the Patient for an Examination: *Positioning and Draping (cont.)*

- **Positions**
  - Sitting
  - Supine / recumbent
  - Dorsal recumbent
  - Lithotomy
  - Trendelenburg’s
  - Fowler’s
  - Prone
  - Sims’
  - Knee-chest
  - Proctologic
Preparing the Patient for an Examination: *Positioning and Draping (cont.)*

- Sitting
- Supine / Recumbent
- Dorsal recumbent
Preparing the Patient for an Examination: *Positioning and Draping* (cont.)

- Lithototomy
- Fowler’s
- Trendelenburg’s
- Prone
Preparing the Patient for an Examination: Positioning and Draping (cont.)

- Sims’
- Proctologic
- Knee-Chest
Preparing the Patient for an Examination: Special Considerations

- Patients from different cultures
  - Avoid stereotyping
  - Avoid making judgments

- Patients with disabilities
  - Provide extra assistance as needed
  - Ask for assistance with patient transfers
Preparing the Patient for an Examination: *Special Considerations (cont.)*

- **Children**
  - Location of exam based on age and ability to cooperate
  - Percussion and auscultation done first and painful areas examined last
  - Doctors may examine older children’s genitalia last as it is embarrassing for them
Preparing the Patient for an Examination: *Special Considerations (cont.)*

- Pregnant women
  - Position considerations
    - Assist as necessary
    - Ensure comfort
  - After lying flat, have patient sit on the exam table before standing
    - Avoids pelvic pooling
    - Dizziness or hyperventilation
Apply Your Knowledge

An elderly female patient needs her lower abdomen and genitalia examined by the physician. What would be the best position to place her in and why?

**ANSWER:** The dorsal recumbent position is recommended over the lithotomy position because an elderly patient may have difficulty placing her legs in stirrups.
Examination Methods

- **Inspection**
  - Visual examination
  - Assesses posture, mannerisms, and hygiene
  - Size, shape, color, position, symmetry
  - Presence of abnormalities

- **Palpation**
  - Touch texture, temperature, shape
  - Presence of vibration or movements
  - Superficial or with additional pressure
Examination Methods (cont.)

- **Percussion**
  - Tapping and striking the body to hear sounds or feel vibrations
  - Determine location, size, or density of structure or organ

- **Auscultation**
  - Listening to body sounds
  - Assess sounds from heart, lungs, and abdominal organs
Examination Methods (cont.)

- Mensuration
  - Measuring
  - Height and weight
  - Length or diameter of extremity
  - Growth of uterus during pregnancy

- Manipulation
  - Systemic moving of a patient’s body parts
  - Range of motion of joints
Apply Your Knowledge

Jimmy Jones is complaining of abdominal pain. What types of examination methods will the physician most likely use to assess this complaint?

**ANSWER:** The physician will use **inspection** to determine if there are any visual abnormalities of Jimmy’s abdomen, **palpation** to feel for any abnormalities, **percussion** to determine if there is fluid or air in the abdomen, and **auscultation** to assess bowel sounds. The medical assistant may be asked to **measure** the abdominal girth.

**Bravo!**
Components of the General Physical Examination

- Overall appearance and the condition of skin, nails, and hair

- The body
  - Head, neck, eyes, ears, nose and sinuses, mouth, and throat
  - Chest and lungs, heart, breasts
  - Abdomen, genitalia, and rectum
  - Musculoskeletal and neurological systems
Components of the General Physical Examination (cont.)

- Medical assistant
  - Be familiar with the components of the examination
  - Know equipment and supplies used
  - Ensure the patient’s comfort
  - Protect the patient’s modesty

Can you name these pieces of examination equipment?
Components of the General Physical Examination (cont.)

- General appearance
  - Skin – a good indicator of overall health
  - Nails and nail beds
  - Hair – pattern of growth and texture

- Head
  - Abnormal condition of scalp or skin
  - Puffiness
  - Abnormal growths
Components of the General Physical Examination (cont.)

- **Neck**
  - Lymph nodes, thyroid glands, and major blood vessels
  - Symmetry and range of motion

- **Eyes**
  - The presence of disease or abnormalities
  - Pupils for light response
  - Muscles
  - Internal structures
Components of the General Physical Examination (cont.)

- Ears
  - Outer ear
    - Symmetry and size
    - Presence of lesions, redness, or swelling
  - Inner ear structures
    - Canals
    - Eardrums

- Nose and sinuses
  - Nasal mucosa
  - Structures of nose
  - Palpation to check for tenderness in sinuses
Components of the General Physical Examination (cont.)

- **Mouth and throat**
  - Mouth – impression of overall health and hygiene
  - Throat
    - Common site of infection
    - Tonsils – swelling or redness

- **Chest and lungs**
  - Inspection
    - Symmetry in expansion
    - Shape
    - Posture position
  - Palpation – fluid or foreign mass in lungs
  - Auscultation – listen for abnormalities
Components of the General Physical Examination (cont.)

- Heart and vascular system
  - Percussion – size of heart
  - Auscultation
    - Heart sounds
    - Rate, rhythm, intensity, and pitch
  - Pulses

- Breasts
  - Palpation for abnormalities

- Abdomen
  - Inspection
  - Auscultation
  - Percussion
  - Palpation
Components of the General Physical Examination (cont.)

- **Genitalia**
  - Female – lithotomy position
  - Male
    - Supine position then standing
    - Infection, structural abnormalities, lumps
  - Have assistant of same sex as patient in room during exam

- **Rectum**
  - Usually performed following exam of genitalia
  - Lesions or abnormalities
  - Occult blood
Components of the General Physical Examination (cont.)

- **Heart and vascular system**
  - Percussion – size of heart
  - Auscultation
    - Heart sounds
    - Rate, rhythm, intensity and pitch
  - Pulses

- **Breasts**
  - Palpation for abnormalities

- **Abdomen**
  - Inspection
  - Auscultation
  - Percussion
  - Palpation
Components of the General Physical Examination (cont.)

- **Musculoskeletal system**
  - Posture
  - Gait
  - Range of motion
  - Muscle strength
  - Body measurements
  - Development and coordination in children

- **Neurological system**
  - Reflexes
  - Mental and emotional status
  - Sensory and motor functions
  - Intellectual assessment in children
  - Mental status and memory in elderly

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Apply Your Knowledge

What is the medical assistant’s role in a general physical examination?

**ANSWER:** The medical assistant should be familiar with the components of the examination, know equipment and supplies used, ensure the patient’s comfort, and protect the patient’s modesty.
Completing the Examination

- Assist patient to a sitting position
- Allow the patient to perform any necessary self-hygiene measures
- Additional tests or procedures
Completing the Examination (cont.)

- Screening for visual acuity
  - Snellen chart – distance
  - Jaeger chart – near vision
  - Ishihara book – color vision
  - Special considerations
    - Children
    - Patients with dementia or Alzheimer’s disease

- Auditory acuity
  - Audiometer
Completing the Examination (cont.)

- Patient education
  - Assess needs
  - Topics
    - Risk factors for disease
    - Medication administration
    - Self-help or diagnostic techniques
  - Do not talk down to patient
  - Ensure understanding
  - Give written instructions
Completing the Examination (cont.)

- Special problems of the elderly
  - Greater need for patient education
  - Common problems:
    - Incontinence
    - Depression
    - Lack of information on preventive medicines
    - Lack of compliance when taking medications
  - Involve family members when possible
Completing the Examination (cont.)

- Follow-up
  - Scheduling the patient for future visits
  - Making outside appointments for diagnostic tests
  - Helping the patient and patient’s family plan for home nursing care
  - Helping the patient obtain help from community or social services
Apply Your Knowledge

What is important to remember when providing patient education?

**ANSWER:** You should provide information in a way the patient can understand it, but you should not talk down to the patient. In addition, you need to verify that the patient understands what you taught.

Super!
In Summary

- **General physical examination**
  - Provides information about patient’s overall health status
  - Assists the physician in making a diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment plan

- **Medical assistant**
  - Addresses the comfort, privacy, and education needs of the patient
  - Anticipates the needs of the physician during the examination
End of Chapter 38

Health is the thing that makes you feel that now is the best time of the year.

~ Franklin P. Adams