



Information for You from Your Health Care Team

How to take a pulse

What is a pulse and why take it?

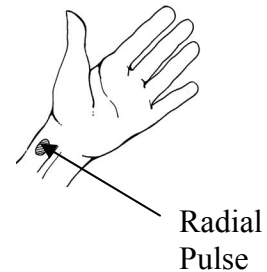
The number of times your heart beats each minute is called your pulse or heart rate. You may need to take your pulse because of an illness, such as heart disease. Your heart may not have a regular beat because it is not working well, or you may be taking medicine that may change how your heart works or beats.

You or someone else will learn how to take your pulse. Caregivers will tell you how often to take your pulse. You may need to take your pulse before taking a medicine. Keep a record of your pulse count and take this record to your doctor.

Different ways to take a pulse

Radial Pulse:

- You will need a watch or clock with a second hand to count your pulse.
- Turn the palm of your hand up. The radial pulse is found close to the inside part of your wrist near your thumb.
- Using your middle and pointer fingers, gently feel the pulse inside your wrist. The beats you feel are the pulse.

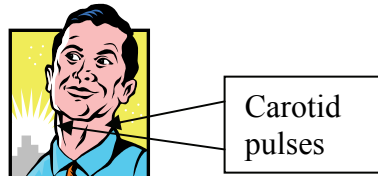


Do not use your thumb to take the pulse because your thumb has a pulse of its own.

- Count your radial pulse for a full minute (60 seconds).
- Write down the results of the pulse count, the date, and the time.

Carotid Pulse:

- You will need a watch or clock with a second hand to count your carotid pulse.
- Your carotid pulse is on the outer part of the left and right side of your neck.



- Using your middle and pointer fingers, gently feel the carotid pulse on **one** side of your neck. The beats you feel are the pulse.

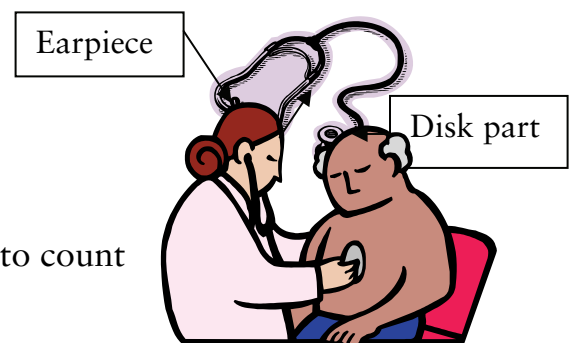
Do not press down on both sides of the neck at the same time.

Do not use your thumb to take the pulse because your thumb has a pulse of its own.

- Count your carotid pulse for a full minute (60 seconds).
- Write down the results of the pulse count, the date, and the time.

Apical Pulse:

- The apical pulse is your pulse when counted with a stethoscope placed over your heart.
- You will need a watch or clock with a second hand to count your apical pulse.
- Put the earpieces of the stethoscope into your ears.
- Place the disk part of the stethoscope over your heart. Your heart is found in the middle of your chest and toward the left side.



- When you hear your heart beat, count the beats for a full minute (60 seconds)
- Write down the results of the pulse count, the date, and the time.

Call your doctor if:

- Your heartbeat is higher than _____ beats a minute or lower than _____ beats each minute.
- You have questions or concerns about your pulse or how to take your pulse.

Speak up at any time if you have any questions or concerns.

Revised January 2009