Vital Signs

Nurses and other medical staff collect vital signs from patients arriving in the emergency room. Data collected from patients, like their heart rate and temperature, help medical professionals decide which patients need urgent and immediate treatment. This essential medical evidence also gives the doctor an idea of how to proceed to diagnose the patient’s illness and ensure appropriate care and treatment. Vital signs provide the first clues when investigating any medical mystery.

**Vital Signs:** Measurements, specifically pulse rate, temperature, respiration rate, and blood pressure that indicate the state of a patient’s essential body functions.

**Blood pressure** is measured using two numbers, the systolic (higher number) and diastolic (lower number) pressures. They’re measured in millimeters of mercury (mm Hg).

How might a patient’s blood pressure be impacted if they’re nervous being in a doctor’s office or emergency room?

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Why might it be good to check a patient’s blood pressure more than once during their visit?

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What other factors might impact or change a person’s blood pressure?

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ER Doctors and Nurses

A patient enters the emergency room complaining of pain near the kidneys. The patient is examined for possible kidney stones, but none are found. The ER nurse continues to take the patient’s vital signs and notices an abnormal respiratory rate. The nurse reviews the vital sign data with the doctor and discusses the patient’s breathing difficulty. Using these additional clues, the ER doctor investigates the patient’s lungs and discovers a blood clot that’s causing the pain. Appropriate treatment is given to remove the clot.

ER medical professionals are trained to pay close attention to vital signs and other medical clues to make quick, sometimes life-dependent, treatment decisions.

What other careers or professionals do you think need to know how to check a patient’s vital signs?

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Why is it necessary to check more than one vital sign on a patient?

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How might vital signs impact a medical professional’s decisions as they investigate an illness?

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