Pulse, How to Take it

A common spot to measure your pulse is the artery on the thumb-side of the wrist. This pulse is the pressure increase in the **radial artery.** This happens every time the heart beats.

To find the pulse, lay one hand down with the palm up. With the index finger and middle finger of the other hand, feel the soft area on the arm about an inch from the wrist and just inside the bone on the thumb side. Touch this area lightly and add more and more pressure until you feel your pulse/heart beat. Count the amount of heart beats for 15 seconds and multiply by four. This will give you your pulse rate. You may also count your pulse for one minute to get the rate. Digital watches or those with second hands can be used. After locating the radial pulse, begin your count with "zero" on the starting time mark; then count the pulses for the desired time length.

Another pulse frequently checked is the **carotid pulse**. This pulse is taken in a place just below the jaw between the voice box and the large muscle on the front and side of the neck. Use the fingertips of the index and middle fingers to press gently. Do not move your fingers around in a massaging motion while trying to find your carotid pulse. This can lower your blood pressure and cause dizziness. The same counting systems used for the radial pulse check can be used for the carotid pulse check.

The pulse differs from person to person. The "*normal*" for men is 72 bpm (beats per minute). For women the normal is 80 bpm. Rates vary considerable depending on the condition of a person. For example, a marathon runner will have a very low pulse rate. The person with heart failure may have a high pulse rate even at rest.

Keep a record of your pulse rates and record any irregularities. The pulse should be regular with evenly spaced beats. If you are trying to improve your fitness, the pulse will be a good guide how you are doing in your fitness training. Generally as your fitness improves, if there are no other health problems, your pulse will gradually become less with activities.

As you achieve a higher fitness, your pulse rate is sure to drop. Measure it at the same time every day or at the same intervals following a workout. People on heart medications or have a pacemaker should keep a log of their exercise pulse checks. This information will help determine the needs and effectiveness of your treatment. Bring this with you when seen by your caregiver.

Pulse monitors are available at most fitness and athletic supply centers. They allow you to monitor your pulse by a digital display of the *heart rate* (pulse) closely during all activities.

Document Released: 06/23/2004
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.