

The Physical Exam

- A quick easy breakdown for MA students

The primary reason for performing a complete physical exam (CPE) is to determine the general state of health and well-being of the pt. The CPE can be performed for various reasons, such as an insurance examination before issuing a policy, as a requirement with a pt.s employment, as a request by a pt, or to assess a pt.s state of health. The exam will cover all major organs and systems of the body.

Because the provider bases the diagnoses on these findings, accuracy is vital.

There are 6 techniques used to evaluate pt.s during a physical exam:

1. **Inspection** is evaluation by the use of sight. Usually the initial part of the exam, when the provider looks at the pt. to observe the skin's color/condition, general appearance, level of anxiety, and gait. Awareness of a person, place, and time as well as any visible injuries/deformities are also noted
2. **Palpation** is evaluation using the sense of touch. Palpation can determine skin temp, size/shape of organs, position/presence of abnormal structures, and degree of abdominal rigidity and aortic pulsations
3. **Percussion** is a means of producing sounds by tapping various parts of the body. The provider listens to the sounds to determine the size, density, and location of underlying visceral organs. Pitch, quality, duration, and resonance are terms used by providers when referring to percussion. Direct percussion is termed immediate and is done by striking the finger against the pt.s body. The type of percussion most often used is indirect or mediate. With indirect, the examiner's finger is placed on the area and struck with a finger on the other hand
4. **Auscultation** is listening to sounds made by the pt.s body. Indirect or mediate auscultation is done with the stethoscope to amplify sounds that arise from the lungs, heart, and visceral organs. Sounds heard by this method include bruits, murmurs, rales, rhythms, and bowel sounds
5. **Mensuration** is measurement. In this part, the pt.s chest and extremities are measured and recorded. It includes all the following: height, weight, head, chest, temp, pulse and resp, and bp. All measurements should be recorded in cm, in, or ft; and pounds or kilograms
6. **Manipulation** is the passive movement of a joint to determine the range of extension and flexion

General appearance:

[Anatomical, ambulate, or sitting; inspection; no equipment or supplies, just provider observations]

The provider may ask the pt. to stand in front of them in anatomical position while they observe the pt.s general appearance

- Appearance: grooming, state of health, body stature, nourished, appears stated age
- Awareness: to person, place and time; confused, distressed
- Gait: manner of walking : shuffle, limp, balance, evidence of stiffness or pain
- Speech: slurring, stutter, loss of voice, impediment
- Hearing: response to sound, volume of speech
- Breath: odors : sweet and fruity with diabetes, acetone with acidosis; oral hygiene

Skin:

[Sitting or standing; inspection or palpation; no equipment]

The provider will inspect anterior and posterior skin surfaces while the pt. Stands in front of them

- Color: redness, bruising, birthmarks, etc
- Condition: dry, flaky, soft, calloused fingers
- Blemishes: moles, warts, scars, acne, rash
- Lumps: palpable masses under skin
- Nails: cuticles, groomed, brittle, peeling, grooved, spooning, clubbing, white lines

Neck:

[Sitting; inspection, palpation, auscultation, or manipulation]

- Range of motion
- Thyroid gland for size, nodules, symmetry
- Lymph nodes and parotid glands palpated
- Observation of swallowing
- Auscultation of carotid arteries

HEENT (Head, eyes, ears, nose, throat)

[Sitting; inspection, palpation; ophthalmoscope, otoscope, tuning fork, nasal speculum, tongue depressor, sterile gauze square]

Eye musculature is observed by requesting pt. Movement. Hearing is evaluated using the tuning fork, and the nasal passages are examined with a speculum. The mouth, throat, and tongue are checked for lesions, and oral hygiene is evaluated

- Head: symmetry, nodules, hair texture and distribution, scalp
- Face: skin condition, presence of facial hair, facial paralysis, eye symmetry
- Eyes: Observed for protrusion, lashes, symmetry, general condition