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Respiratory Examination of a Volunteer

Practical 09 / Supervised clinical examination

Aim

Demonstrate respiratory inspection, palpation, percussion and auscultation in a normal or simulated subject.

Principle

Comparison of symmetrical points helps detect regional changes. Different findings arise from changes in air, fluid, consolidation or airway calibre.

Materials and Requirements

- Consenting volunteer or manikin
- Stethoscope and chart of paired examination sites

Procedure

1. Ask about breathlessness, cough and relevant symptoms and check general appearance and respiratory rate.
2. Confirm consent, seat the volunteer comfortably and expose matched chest areas while maintaining privacy. Observe the respiratory rate at rest for a full minute when irregular.
3. Inspect chest symmetry and breathing effort. Compare chest movement gently at equal levels.
4. Inspect shape, accessory muscle use and chest wall movement from front and back. Assess expansion at matching lower chest levels and note any consistent asymmetry.

Continue with step 5 on the next page.

Procedure Continued

Respiratory Examination of a Volunteer

5. Percuss comparable interspaces in a systematic order and compare the resulting notes.
6. Place the pleximeter finger firmly in an interspace and tap it lightly. Compare corresponding sites side to side from upper to lower zones and avoid the scapulae when seeking lung resonance.
7. Auscultate corresponding sites. Describe breath sound quality and any added sound, timing and location.
8. Use the diaphragm on bare skin and listen over comparable anterior and posterior zones for at least one complete cycle at each site. Ask for gentle mouth breathing and pause if the volunteer feels dizzy.
9. Describe a suspected difference by side, level and respiratory phase, then confirm it on a repeat comparison. Record any area omitted and clean the stethoscope.

Precautions

- Stop for respiratory distress and contact the supervising team.
- Avoid asking a breathless subject to repeatedly take deep breaths.

Observations and Interpretation

Respiratory Examination of a Volunteer

Observations and Record

Item	What to record	What it tells you
Breathing pattern	Rate, symmetry and effort	Defines baseline and work of breathing
Percussion	Resonant or altered note and location	Helps identify regional change
Breath sounds	Character, symmetry and added sounds	Correlates with inspection and percussion

Worked Example

Symmetrical movement, comparable resonance and bilateral vesicular breath sounds support a normal teaching examination. A focal clue should be confirmed against nearby and contralateral sites.

Result and Interpretation

Give a brief sequence of normal and abnormal findings in the same documented order.

Viva Questions and Answers

Why compare paired sites?

It helps detect asymmetry and reduces technique differences.

What makes crackles useful to describe?

Their timing, location and change with manoeuvres can guide the differential.

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