

# Nursing Assisting

## A Foundation in Caregiving

Diana L. Dugan, RN

THIRD EDITION

Formerly *Successful Nursing Assistant Care*



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**20**  
years!



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## Notice to Readers

Though the guidelines and procedures contained in this text are based on consultations with healthcare professionals, they should not be considered absolute recommendations. The instructor and readers should follow employer, local, state, and federal guidelines concerning healthcare practices. These guidelines change, and it is the reader's responsibility to be aware of these changes and of the policies and procedures of her or his healthcare facility.

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## Gender Usage

This textbook utilizes the pronouns "he," "his," "she," and "hers" interchangeably to denote healthcare team members and residents.

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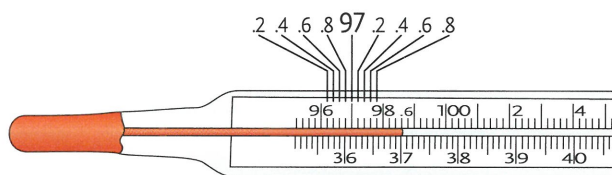
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An increase in body temperature may indicate an infection or disease. Signs and symptoms of a fever, in addition to the temperature reading, include headache, fatigue, muscle aches, and chills. Skin may feel warm and look flushed. Residents with darker skin tones who have a fever may show more subtle skin color changes.

If you suspect a fever, always take a temperature (see next Learning Objective). Fevers can develop quickly. It is possible to detect an infection early and prevent complications from occurring. Report fevers to the nurse immediately.

#### 4. List guidelines for taking body temperature

**Thermometers** measure heat or cold in either degrees **Fahrenheit** (F) or **Celsius** (C). Fahrenheit and Celsius are two different scales that are used to measure temperature. The Fahrenheit scale is more common in the United States. In degrees Fahrenheit (F), each long line represents one degree and each short line represents two-tenths of a degree. In degrees Celsius (C), the long lines represent one degree and the short lines represent one-tenth of a degree (Fig. 13-2). In most other countries, the Celsius scale is used, along with the metric system of measurement.



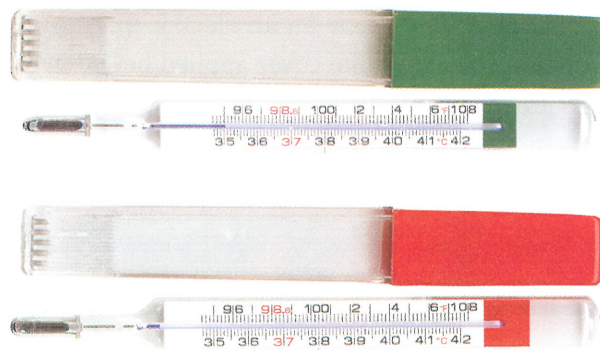
**Fig. 13-2.** This shows a normal temperature reading: 98.6°F and 37°C.

There are four main sites on the body for measuring a temperature: the mouth (oral), the rectum (rectal), the armpit (axillary), and the ear (tympanic). Taking a temperature orally is most common. A rectal temperature is considered to be the most accurate, while an axillary temperature is considered to be the least accurate.

Common types of thermometers are:

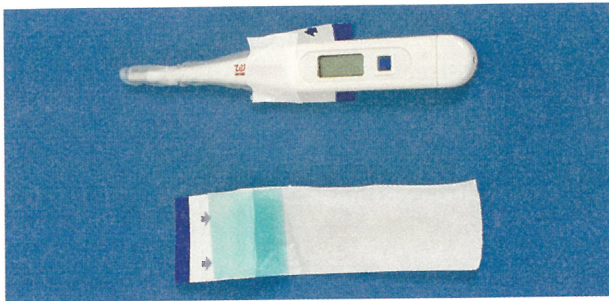
- Mercury-free
- Digital
- Electronic
- Disposable
- Tympanic
- Temporal artery

The mercury-free thermometer can be used to take an oral, rectal, or axillary temperature. Thermometers are usually color-coded to tell you which is an oral and which is a rectal thermometer. Oral thermometers are usually green or blue. Rectal thermometers are usually red (Fig. 13-3).



**Fig. 13-3.** A mercury-free oral thermometer and a mercury-free rectal thermometer. Oral thermometers are usually green or blue; rectal thermometers are usually red. (PHOTOS COURTESY OF RG MEDICAL DIAGNOSTICS OF WIXOM, MI, RGMD.COM)

Digital thermometers can be used to take an oral, rectal, or axillary temperature. This thermometer displays results digitally. A digital thermometer usually takes two to 60 seconds to show the temperature. The thermometer will usually flash or beep when the temperature has registered. These models are battery-operated and require that the battery be replaced periodically. A digital thermometer requires the use of a disposable plastic sheath used to cover the probe (Fig. 13-4). This helps prevent infection. The sheath is used once and then disposed of in a facility-approved container.



**Fig. 13-4.** A digital thermometer with a disposable sheath cover underneath it.

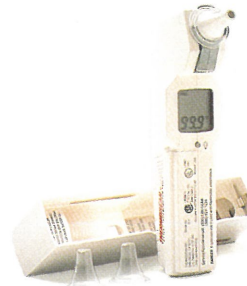
The electronic thermometer is battery-operated and is stored in a wall unit for recharging when not in use (Fig. 13-5). It can be used to take an oral, rectal, or axillary temperature. An electronic thermometer registers the temperature digitally in two to 60 seconds. The thermometer flashes or makes a sound when the temperature is displayed. The probe on an electric thermometer must have a probe cover applied before use. The probe cover is used on only one person and is then disposed of properly. The probe cover cannot be used on more than one resident.



**Fig. 13-5.** An electronic thermometer.

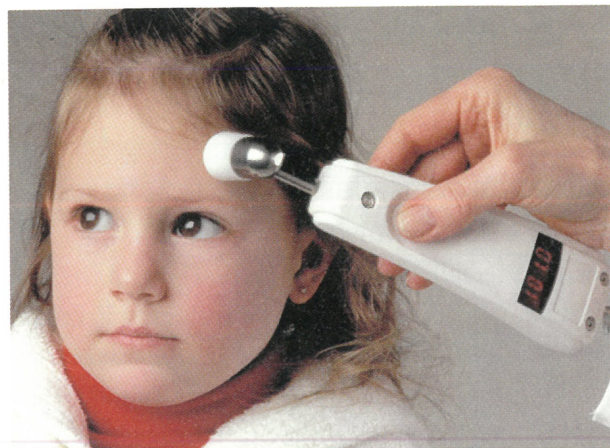
A disposable thermometer can be used to take oral or axillary temperatures. This type of thermometer is for single use, meaning it is used once and then disposed of in the proper container. It does not require the use of a disposable sheath. A disposable thermometer helps reduce the risk of infection, since it is only used on one resident. These types of thermometers are often used on residents who are in isolation. The temperature reading registers in approximately 60 seconds. A disposable thermometer is made of rigid plastic and must be removed slowly to avoid causing tears in the mouth.

A tympanic thermometer is used to measure the temperature reading in the ear (Fig. 13-6). It registers the temperature in seconds. When using this thermometer, it is important to follow instructions to get as accurate a reading as possible. Ear wax may cause an inaccurate reading. Ear injury is possible with this thermometer. Hearing aids may need to be removed before taking a temperature this way.



**Fig. 13-6.** A tympanic thermometer.

Another type of thermometer is the temporal artery thermometer (Fig. 13-7). This is an infrared thermometer that measures the temperature of the temporal artery, the artery under the skin of the forehead, in about three seconds. The probe on the thermometer is moved straight across the forehead to obtain a reading. It is non-invasive, meaning it does not require a probe to be inserted into the ear, the mouth, under the arm, or in the rectum. Clothing does not need to be removed in order to take a temperature. If temporal artery thermometers are used at your facility, you will be trained how to use them.



**Fig. 13-7.** A temporal artery thermometer. (PHOTO COURTESY OF EXERGEN CORPORATION, 800-422-3006, WWW.EXERGEN.COM)