Geriatric Emergencies

National EMS Education Standard Competencies

Special Patient Populations

Applies a fundamental knowledge of growth, development, and aging and assessment findings to provide basic emergency care and transportation for a patient with special needs.

Geriatrics

❯ Impact of age-related changes on assessment and care (pp 1301–1310)
❯ Changes associated with aging, psychosocial aspects of aging and age-related assessment and treatment modifications for the major or common geriatric diseases and/or emergencies
  • Cardiovascular diseases (pp 1287–1289, 1301–1305)
  • Respiratory diseases (pp 1286–1287, 1301–1305)
  • Neurological diseases (pp 1290–1293, 1301–1305)
  • Endocrine diseases (pp 1295, 1301–1305)
  • Alzheimer disease (pp 1291, 1301–1305)
  • Dementia (pp 1291, 1301–1305)

Patients With Special Challenges

❯ Recognizing and reporting abuse and neglect (pp 1312–1313 and Chapter 34, Pediatric Emergencies)
❯ Health care implications of
  • Abuse (pp 1312–1313 and Chapter 34, Pediatric Emergencies)
  • Neglect (pp 1312–1313 and Chapter 34, Pediatric Emergencies)
  • Homelessness (Chapter 36, Patients With Special Challenges)
  • Poverty (Chapter 36, Patients With Special Challenges)
  • Bariatics (Chapter 36, Patients With Special Challenges)
  • Technology dependent (Chapter 36, Patients With Special Challenges)
  • Hospice/terminally ill (Chapter 36, Patients With Special Challenges)
  • Tracheostomy care/dysfunction (Chapter 36, Patients With Special Challenges)
  • Homecare (Chapter 36, Patients With Special Challenges)
  • Sensory deficit/loss (Chapter 36, Patients With Special Challenges)
  • Developmental disability (Chapter 36, Patients With Special Challenges)

Trauma

Applies fundamental knowledge to provide basic emergency care and transportation based on assessment findings for an acutely injured patient.

Special Considerations in Trauma

❯ Recognition and management of trauma in the:
  • Pregnant patient (Chapter 33, Obstetrics and Neonatal Care)
  • Pediatric patient (Chapter 34, Pediatric Emergencies)
  • Geriatric patient (pp 1306–1310)
❯ Pathophysiology, assessment, and management of trauma in the:
  • Pregnant patient (Chapter 33, Obstetrics and Neonatal Care)
  • Pediatric patient (Chapter 34, Pediatric Emergencies)
  • Geriatric patient (pp 1306–1310)
  • Cognitively impaired patient (Chapter 36, Patients With Special Challenges)

Knowledge Objectives

1. Define the term geriatrics. (p 1283)
2. Recognize some of the special aspects of the lives of older people. (pp 1283–1285)
3. Know generational considerations when communicating with a geriatric patient. (pp 1283–1284)
4. Describe the common complaints and the leading causes of death in older people. (p 1285)
5. Discuss the physiologic changes associated with the aging process and the age-related assessment and treatment modifications that result. (pp 1285–1299)
6. Define polypharmacy and the toxicity issues that can result. (pp 1297–1298)
7. Discuss the effect of aging on behavioral emergencies. (pp 1298–1299)
8. Explain the GEMS diamond and its role in the assessment and care of the geriatric patient. (pp 1299–1300)
9. Explain special considerations when performing the patient assessment process on a geriatric patient with a medical condition. (pp 1301–1305)
10. Discuss the effects of aging on environmental emergencies. (p 1306)
11. Explain special considerations when performing the patient assessment process on a geriatric patient with a traumatic injury. (pp 1306–1310)
12. Explain special considerations when responding to calls at nursing and skilled care facilities. (pp 1310–1311)
13. Define an advance directive and considerations with older patients. (pp 1311–1312)
14. Discuss the prevalence of elder abuse and neglect; include why the extent of elder abuse is not well known. (pp 1312–1313)
15. Recognize acts of commission or omission by a caregiver that result in harm, potential harm, or threat of harm to a geriatric patient. (p 1312)
16. Explain the assessment and care of a geriatric patient who has potentially been abused or neglected. (pp 1313–1314)

**Skills Objectives**
There are no skills objectives for this chapter.

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**Introduction**

**Geriatrics** is the assessment and treatment of disease in someone who is 65 years or older. In this chapter, 65 years is used as the threshold age to be consistent with the definition used by other medical groups and governmental agencies. How fast one ages, though, is a function of genetics, lifestyle, and, perhaps, attitude.

People born between 1946 and 1964, known as the baby boomer generation, are much more active today than people their age were in previous generations. The older population continues to increase. It is projected that between 2012 and 2050, the population aged 65 and older is expected to nearly double. This is a significant trend for EMS because older people are major users of both emergency medical services and health care systems in general.

Geriatric patients present a special challenge for health care providers because the classic presentations of injuries and illness are often altered by chronic conditions, multiple medications, and the physiology of aging. To provide effective treatment for this growing population, you must understand the issues related to aging and modify some of your assessment and treatment approaches accordingly.

Being a patient advocate for an older patient involves much more than management of medical and traumatic emergencies. As the older population increases, communities, companies, and hospitals are encouraging awareness of geriatric issues through the media and creating programs that promote prevention of injuries. EMTs who respond to the homes of geriatric patients are in an ideal position to provide key information to others in health care and social services systems. Interventions for geriatric patients may include reviewing the home environment to ensure that safe and tolerable living conditions exist, providing information on how to prevent falls, and making referrals to appropriate social service agencies when a patient needs assistance. Often, simple preventive measures can help older people avoid further injury, costly medical treatment, and death. You are in a position to not only recognize and manage a serious emergency, but also to help prevent problems before they occur.

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**Generational Considerations**

It is important to understand and appreciate how the life of an older person might differ from yours. You will see older people who have recently lost a spouse and are struggling to fill the spouse’s role, such as by managing the finances or doing the housework. Many older people also live on a fixed income, which can be very challenging. Some older people may not take all of their medications in an effort to save money. Many struggle to stay independent as long as possible and are living in the homes in which they raised their children—children who have now moved far away.

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**YOU are the Provider**

At 0625 hours, you are dispatched to a residence at 644 Yolanda Street for an 82-year-old woman whose daughter called 9-1-1 because her mother is experiencing shortness of breath. You and your partner respond to the scene, which is located only a short distance away.

1. As an EMT, why is it important for you to understand the anatomic and physiologic changes that occur with aging?
2. How does the process of aging affect a person’s respiratory system?