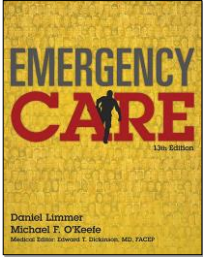


## Emergency Care

THIRTEENTH EDITION



# CHAPTER 34

### Geriatric Emergencies

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## Age-Related Changes

- After age 30, organ systems lose 1 percent of function each year.
- Maximum heart rate declines.
- Older patient with internal bleeding will not exhibit heart rate as rapid as expected.
- If unaware, EMT may miss that older patient is in shock.

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## How Do These Systems Change?

- Cardiovascular System
- Respiratory System
- Digestive System
- Liver and Kidneys
- Endocrine System
- Musculoskeletal System
- Nervous System
- Integumentary System

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## Communicating with Older Patients

- Causes of patient's communication difficulties
  - Changes in hearing, vision, memory, and dentition
  - Residual effects of stroke or dementia
- First assume altered mental status as the result of present injury/illness.

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## Communicating with Older Patients



Always try to communicate directly with an older patient rather than asking others about her.

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## History and Assessment of Older Adult Patient

- Scene size-up and safety
  - Look inside and outside residence for clues to physical and mental abilities.
    - Condition of residence
    - Half-eaten food
    - House dirty or clean
    - Items left out that patient can trip on

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## History and Assessment of Older Adult Patient

- Primary assessment
  - Forming a general impression
  - Assessing mental status
  - Assessing the airway
  - Assessing breathing
  - Assessing circulation
  - Identifying priority patients



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## History and Assessment of Older Adult Patient

- Secondary assessment
  - SAMPLE History
    - Take time needed to get full information.
    - Find out whether patient is compliant with medical advice.
    - Ask family members, others familiar with patient's condition.
  - Physical exam
  - Baseline vital signs

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## History and Assessment of Older Adult Patient

- Steps of the physical exam
  - Head and neck
  - Chest and abdomen
  - Pelvis and extremities
    - Hip and proximal femur commonly fractured in fall.
    - Weakening of bone results in injuries to wrists and proximal humerus.



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## History and Assessment of Older Adult Patient

- Steps of the physical exam
  - Pelvis and extremities
    - Check extremities for edema and swelling.
      - Signs of underlying heart, vascular, or liver disease.

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## History and Assessment of Older Adult Patient

- Steps of the physical exam
  - Spine
    - Commonly injured in MVC accidents
    - Abnormal curvature may make immobilization challenging.
    - Do your best to keep vertebrae in alignment and reduce patient's discomfort.



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## History and Assessment of Older Adult Patient

- Reassessment
  - More common for older adults to show a slow, steady decline in condition.
  - You may be lulled into a false sense of security.
  - Reassess at regular intervals and compare with previous findings.
  - Reassess mental status.
  - Maintain an open airway.

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## History and Assessment of Older Adult Patient

- Reassessment
  - Monitor breathing.
  - Reassess pulse.
  - Monitor skin color, temperature, and moisture.
  - Reassess vital signs every 5 minutes if unstable, or 15 minutes if stable.
  - Ensure that all appropriate care and treatments are being given.

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## Think About It

- What is commonly seen when assessing an elderly patient's blood pressure?
- What is most commonly fractured in female elderly patients?
- What are some challenges you might face in immobilizing elderly patients?



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## Illness and Injury in Older Patients

- Elderly patients prone to some problems because of age-related changes
- Problems present differently than in younger patients.
- May present with vague signs or symptoms

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## Medication Side Effects and Interactions

- Compliance
  - Some older adults must make the choice between food and expensive medication.
  - Even when a medication is taken as directed, it can have a number of adverse effects.

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## Medication Side Effects and Interactions

- Drug-patient interactions
  - Can occur because of inability to clear medications from body as quickly as before
- Drug-drug interactions
  - When two drugs interact



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## Shortness of Breath

- Can result from diseases that cause this symptom in younger patients, such as asthma or pulmonary embolism
- Elderly patients more likely to have emphysema, or a combination of these diseases
- Chief complaint of patient experiencing a cardiac problem

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## Chest Pain

- Complaint of chest pain can indicate many conditions.
  - Angina
  - Myocardial infarction
  - Pneumonia
  - Aortic aneurysm

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## Altered Mental Status

- Can be due to:
  - Adverse effects from medications
  - Hypoglycemia
  - Stroke
  - Sepsis
  - Generalized infection in bloodstream
  - Hypothermia
  - Pneumonia

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## Abdominal Pain and Gastrointestinal Bleeding

- Sign of a serious condition such as:
  - Abdominal aortic aneurysm
  - Bowel obstruction or blockage
  - Diverticulosis
  - Internal bleeding
  - Cancers of gastrointestinal tract
  - Ulcers
  - Adverse effects of medications



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## Dizziness, Weakness, and Malaise

- Do not take complaints lightly.
- Can be associated with a number of serious conditions
- Can be life-threatening
- Be diligent in assessment, even for vague symptoms.

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## Depression and Suicide

- In older adults, can be caused by:
  - Conditions that limit activity
  - Medications that reduce energy
  - Loss of friends and spouse
  - Biochemical imbalance

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## Rash, Pain, Flulike Symptoms

- Shingles or herpes zoster
  - Virus reawakens after years.
    - Appears as belt-like band around torso
    - Scabs over after a few days
    - Pain on side of torso
  - EMT can contract it from fluid.



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## Chest and Abdomen



A shingles rash often appears as a narrow, beltlike band around the torso.  
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## Falls

- Death may result from complications of fall.
  - Bruised ribs, cannot cough because of pain, develops pneumonia
- May indicate more serious problem
  - Abnormal heart rhythm, stroke, internal bleeding
- Assess for cause of fall as well as injuries from fall.

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## Elder Abuse and Neglect

- Ways in which older adults can be abused or neglected
  - Physically
  - Psychologically
  - Financially
- Can be difficult to detect
- Many states have laws that require reporting of suspicions.

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## Effects on Relationships

- Over time, one member of a couple often becomes a caregiver for a sick partner.
  - If caregiver becomes sick or injured, their situation may become difficult or impossible.
  - Caregiver guilt or burnout
- You may need to make short-term arrangements for the partner.

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## Loss of Independence

- Help patient who is losing independence due to illness/injury.
- Treat patient with dignity.
- Do not minimize fears and concerns.
- Lock up house.
- Arrange for care for pets.
- Be reassuring.
- Empathize.

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## Think About It

- What are some important facts to remember when treating elderly patients?
- What are the best preventative measures for an EMT who comes in contact with shingles?
- What is a side effect of NSAID use?

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## Information About Alzheimer Disease Video



Scientists are testing a number of drugs to see if they slow the disease, or help reduce symptoms.

Click on the screenshot to view a video on the subject of Alzheimer disease.

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## Elder Mistreatment and Abuse Video



and create care needs that exceed their caregivers at higher risk of being mistreated.

Click on the screenshot to view a video on the topic of elder mistreatment and abuse.

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## Chapter Review

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## Chapter Review

- Although we can make some generalizations about age-related changes, older people are individuals who can differ significantly in their health care needs.
- The prevalence of many diseases grows with age, increasing the proportion of the individuals in the older population who requires health care.

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## Chapter Review

- Age-related decline in system function alters the body's response to illness and injury, requiring modified interpretation of assessment findings and complaints.
- Multiple medical problems and medications can lead to unpredictable problems and drug interactions.

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## Chapter Review

- Changes in the nervous system, along with isolation, financial problems, loss of loved ones, and chronic health problems, all increase the risk for depression in the elderly. Depression can interfere with a person's self-care and ability to communicate.

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## Remember

- Aging produces common body changes, with different impacts on different patients. Evaluate older patients individually.
- In some cases, EMT must adapt assessment and treatment procedures to account for age-related anatomic and psychosocial changes.

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## Remember

- Medication difficulties are common in older patients. EMTs must keep this in mind when assessing and treating this age group.
- Elder abuse is a far too common problem. EMTs must learn to recognize the signs of abuse and neglect.

## Questions to Consider

- What size blood pressure cuff might be better suited to an elderly patient?
- What challenges might you encounter when assessing the mental status of an elderly patient?

## Critical Thinking

- You are called to the nursing facility for an 85-year-old female who is having trouble breathing and is very confused. What do you suspect may be wrong with this patient? What actions would you take in treating this patient?