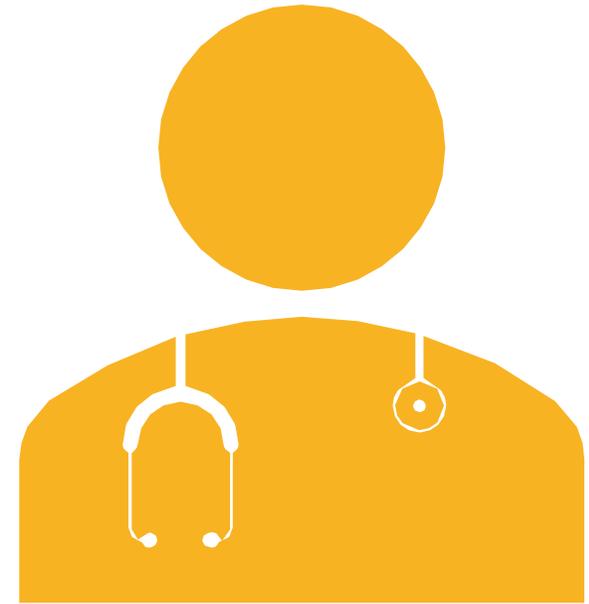


# **OBSERVING FOR SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS**

**FOR TBHS STAFF AND TBHS  
PROVIDER NETWORK RESIDENTIAL HOMES**



As support staff, it is a vital part of your job to ensure people you support remain as healthy as possible and also to support people in understanding the importance of maintaining their own health.

# OBSERVING FOR SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS

- This course includes:
  - The difference between a sign of an illness and a symptom of an illness
  - Importance of communication and observation skills
  - Risk factors related to health issues
  - Body observation
  - How to objectively document the information you gather
  - Falls

**PEOPLE WITH  
DEVELOPMENTAL  
DISABILITIES OFTEN  
NEED ADDITIONAL  
SUPPORT AND  
ASSISTANCE TO  
MAINTAIN THEIR OWN  
HEALTH.**

# OBSERVING FOR SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS

- Early detection of changes should indicate further investigation on your part, as it may be an indication of a medical condition, illness, or injury. These may include changes in:
  - Daily Routine
  - Appearance
  - General Manner
  - Mood
  - Behavior
  - Way of Communicating
  - Physical Health
- Signs and Symptoms are critical in what course of action you will take.



# SIGN OF AN ILLNESS



- A sign of an illness is an indication that something is not right in a person's body.
- Signs are usually noticed by other people.
- Examples of people who notice signs:
  - Person's support staff
  - Family Member
  - Doctor
  - Nurse

# **SIGNS OF AN ILLNESS**

- Signs of an illness may include:
  - Rapid Pulse
  - High Temperature
  - Limping
  - Sweating
  - Coughing
  - Bruising

# SYMPTOMS OF AN ILLNESS

- Symptoms of an illness is an indication that something is not right in a person's body.
- Unlike a sign of an illness, a symptom is what the person experiences and communicates.
- Generally, it is not noticed by anyone else.
- Symptoms of an illness may include:
  - Chills
  - Abdominal Pain
  - Weakness
  - Nausea
  - Headache
  - Backache

# KNOW YOUR CONSUMERS

Often, both signs and symptoms of an illness are used in conjunction with each other to gather information about someone's medical condition such as an illness or an injury.

Before you can determine if someone has an illness or injury it is important to know as much as possible about them. If you don't know what is normal for an individual, you won't know if something has changed. This is often referred to as a person's "baseline" condition.

# OBSERVATION AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- Observation and communication skills help you to identify changes in someone.
- These skills help you to gather information that help you to decide what course of action to take.
- Observation skills involve using most of your senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell) to gather information.
- Communication skills can help you gather valuable information.
- When communicating with someone, ask the person questions and listen to what they are telling you.



# NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- There may be times when an individual has difficulty trying to communicate their needs. This is especially true if the person is unable to use words to communicate.
  - The person may indicate they are in pain by crying or pointing.
  - When you notice an individual holding a body part and crying, this indicates that something is wrong.
  - Pacing, clenched fist may indicate a change in mood or behavior.
  - Individuals may need you to support them in identifying any changes in their health. This includes ensuring the person receives appropriate care.

# IMPORTANCE OF IDENTIFYING A SIGN OR SYMPTOM

- Understanding the importance of identifying a sign or symptom of an illness can be crucial.

Examples:

- Abdominal pain can be caused by various conditions such as indigestion, gallstones, or the flu.
  - A headache and nausea can be an indication of the flu, depression, or a bump to the head.
- This is when your observation and communication skills become even more important.



HOW A PERSON IS ACTING MAY ALSO  
BE AN INDICATION OF HOW THAT  
PERSON IS FEELING.

ALWAYS BE ALERT DURING YOUR DAY  
TO DAY INTERACTIONS WITH THE  
PEOPLE YOU SUPPORT FOR CHANGES  
IN THE PERSON'S BEHAVIOR OR  
PERFORMANCE.

# CHRONIC VS. ACUTE



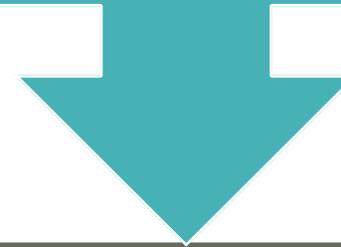
- Signs and Symptoms of an Illness may either be chronic or acute.
- Chronic
  - Begins gradually
  - May have several causes
  - Persists for an indefinite time
  - Examples of chronic illness include diabetes, heart disease, arthritis
- Acute
  - Comes on suddenly
  - Usually as an identifiable cause
  - Lasts for a shorter period of time
  - Examples of acute illness include appendicitis, ear infections, and pneumonia

# OBSERVING FOR SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS

- Any signs or symptoms that are persistent and unresolved could indicate a more serious illness.
  - The person should be seen by their health care provider.
- Sometimes the presence of a sign or symptom may not be enough information to know the cause of the person's health concern.
  - Example: A rash could be an indication of several things including poison ivy, a food allergy, or an infectious disease like the measles. But, if the rash is seen along with other signs or symptoms such as a high fever, chills, feeling tired, or a sore throat, you can get a better picture of what the health concern might be.

# OBSERVING FOR SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS

Sometimes a person's signs and symptoms don't provide enough clues by themselves to determine the cause.



In this case the person's health care provider may order medical tests such as:

X-Rays

Blood tests

Other  
Diagnostic  
Procedures

# OBSERVING FOR SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS

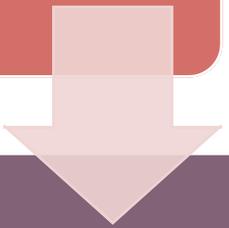
**There are certain risk factors that put persons with developmental disabilities at a higher risk of developing serious health problems**

## **Risk Factors**

- Musculoskeletal Weakness
- Decrease in Muscular Strength and Tone. This can contribute to swallowing difficulties.
- Changes in the Nervous System
- Weakened Immune Systems
- Certain Behaviors

# MUSCULOSKELETAL WEAKNESS

Can make an individual more susceptible of coordination difficulties.



Coordination difficulties can change a person's balance or gait, putting a person at higher risk for falls, causing possible bruises and fractures.



It is not uncommon for people with developmental disabilities to have dysphagia.



Dysphagia is a swallowing disorder that causes the person to have difficulty chewing or swallowing food.



This can lead to a higher risk of choking or the drawing in of fluids or solids into the lungs. This is known as aspiration.



Aspiration can lead to an infection of the lungs called pneumonia.



Common causes of dysphagia include:

- Aging
- Medication
- Neurological Disorders

# DYSPHAGIA

# CHANGES IN THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

- May cause a person to have a higher threshold for pain.
- The person may not react as quickly in a dangerous situation
- The person may not complain about any pain they are experiencing as early as someone without this health issue.

# WEAKENED IMMUNE SYSTEMS

- May put a person at a higher risk for developing infections.
- A weakened immune system could be due to the syndrome that caused their disability, medications the person is taking, or other specific health issues.
- Anytime there is an increased number of people living together the risk of getting and passing along infection increases.



# CERTAIN BEHAVIORS

- The individual may lack the capability of understanding how certain behaviors can put them at risk for having health issues.
  - Example:
    - If someone has a tendency to wander and it is cold outside, they might leave the house without wearing a coat, hat, gloves, or even their shoes. This could put the person at risk for developing a cold related health concern such as frostbite or hypothermia.
    - PICA behaviors (eating non-food substances).

# **BODY CHECK**

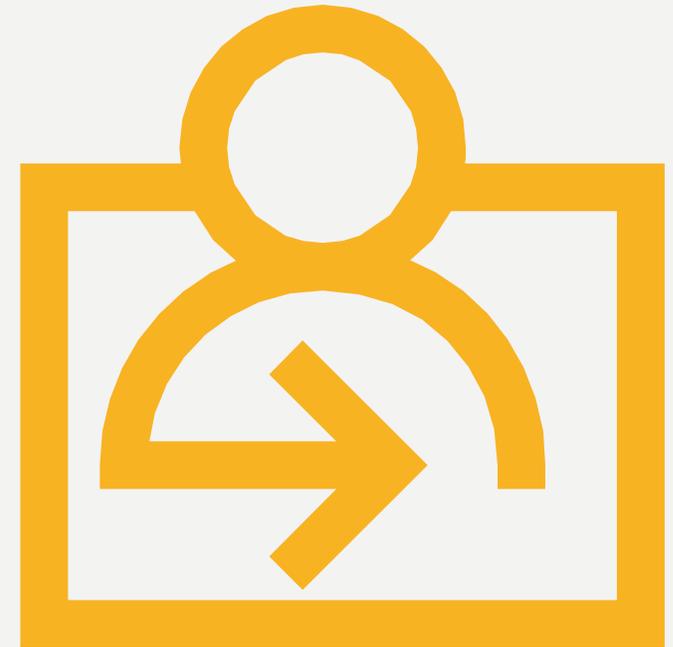
A body check is one way of determining any potential health concerns someone may have.

When assisting someone in doing a body observation always preserve the person's dignity as well as their right to privacy.

Body checks may be completed by the person or by someone else, depending on the amount of assistance needed.

# BODY CHECK

- Maintain a balance between what you know the person is willing and able to do themselves and the level of assistance you offer to accomplish this.
- As support staff you teach and ensure that people know when and how to wash their hands.
- For individuals who are not able to do this on their own, you will need to assist.
- The level of assistance for each person can range from a verbal reminder to doing it for them.
- Your role also includes teaching the person to take a more independent role in their own healthcare.



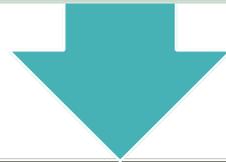
# BODY CHECK

Combining body checks with teaching self-care skills will benefit the person.

The person will become more independent

Need less help from others

Maintain their privacy



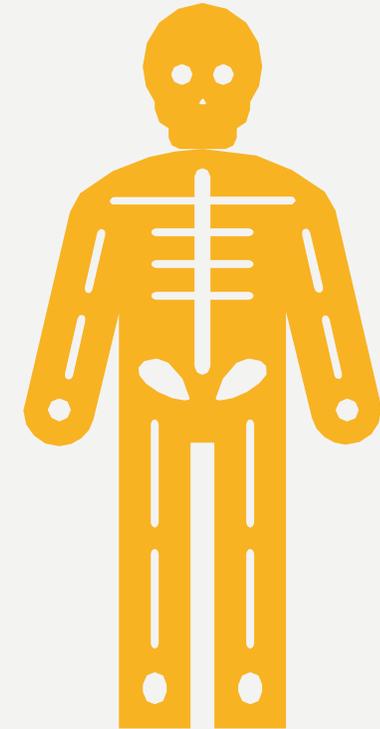
These can all have a positive impact on the person's overall health and wellbeing.

# BODY CHECK

- A body check should be completed at regular intervals.
- The general rule of thumb is once a month at the very least or at any other time there is a health concern.
- This is also a good time to complete breast and testicular exams.
- There is no perfect time to do a body check so always consider what works best with the person's daily routine and schedule.
- When a person takes a shower or bath, or when dressing or undressing are always good times to complete a body observation.
- Body check should always be done immediately following an injury, and again approximately 10-12 hours later.

# BODY CHECK

- Best way to proceed to do a body check is to use the head to toe approach.
- Start at the person's head and work down to a person's toes.
- A body check checklist is a good way to ensuring no area of a person's body is overlooked.
- If you need to assist someone in doing a body observation, involve the person in as much of the process as they are capable of doing.
  - Examples include: verbally guiding the person in observing their own body, or using the appropriate level of assistance to teach the person how to proceed.
- Always work towards increasing the person's involvement. This way the person can assume as much of the responsibility for their own body observation as they can handle.



# BODY CHECK

- Start by observing overall appearance of the skin.
  - Look for signs of rough, red or swollen skin areas, rashes and moles that may have changed in appearance, bruises, scratches, or anything else that is out of the ordinary for that person.
  - Continue making observations for the rest of the body using the head to toe approach. This approach will help to make the body observation easy and less likely for any area of the body to be missed.

# **BODY CHECK ORDER**

Hair/Scalp, Eyes, Ears, Nose, Throat,  
Teeth, Gums, Neck

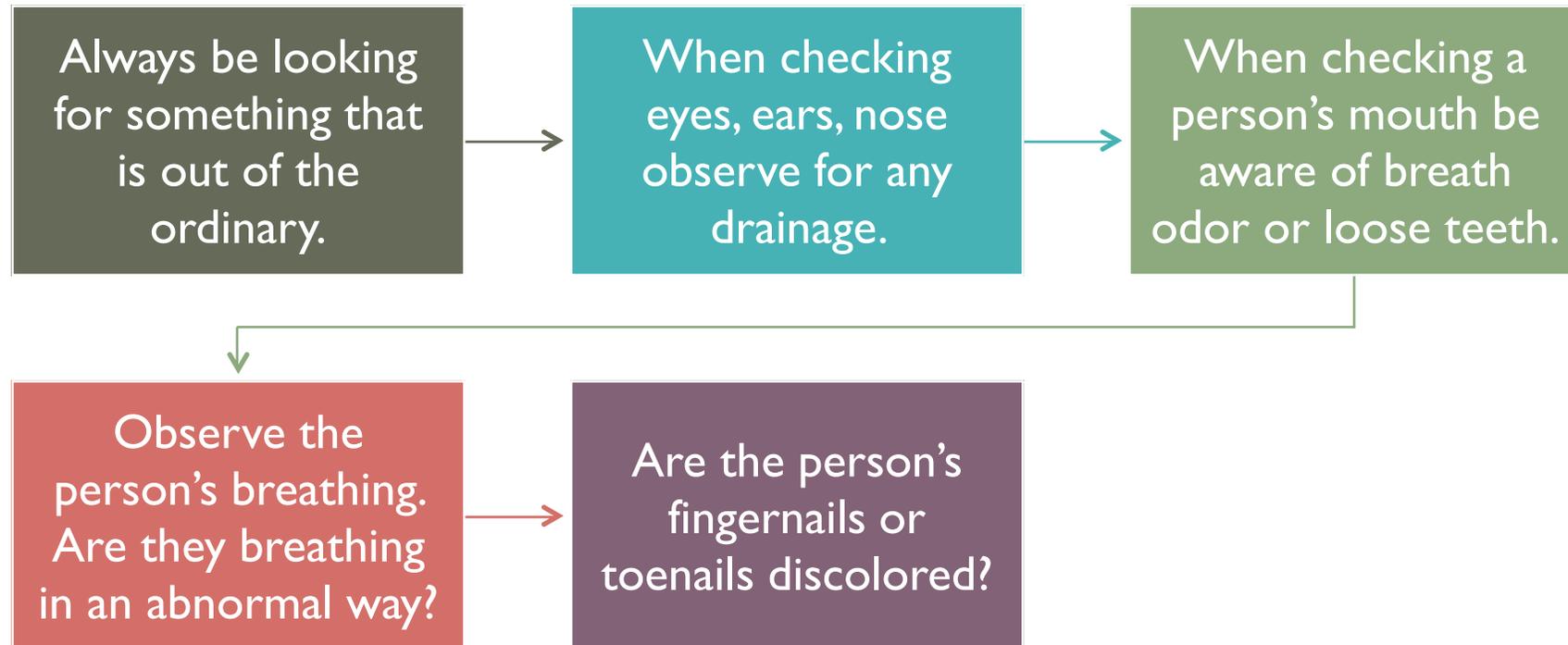


Chest/Back, Breasts, Extremities  
(hands, arms and legs, feet)



Abdomen, Genitalia, Rectal Area

# SKIN OBSERVATION



# SKIN OBSERVATION

- When something out of the ordinary is observed during the body observation report it promptly to the TBHS assigned nurse or on-call nurse.
- Promptly means immediately such as abdominal pain.
- When making a phone call to the nurse present your observations objectively. Tell the nurse what you observed and not what you think it means.
- Sometimes promptly means at your earliest convenience. For example, a rash.

# DOCUMENTATION

- Document your observations accurately using specific and precise terms as you can.
- After you have determined that someone has a change in their health status, you will need to decide what level of response to take.
- Levels of Response
  - Routine Care at Home
  - Calling the TBHS RN or TBHS RN on call
  - Urgent Care or Emergency Room
  - Calling 911

# **ROUTINE CARE AT HOME**

- If you decide your course of action is to provide routine care at home you will simply provide basic first aid.
  - Examples include: mild headache, minor cut, small bruise, mosquito bite, or scalp condition.
  - Check non-emergent standing orders to see if there is something that you can give the person for relief.
  - If the person's condition gets worse you should make a call to the TBHS Nursing staff or the On-call Nurse.

# CALLING TBHS RN OR ON-CALL RN

- Calling the person’s healthcare provider or taking a person to urgent care is prompted by a potentially serious sign or symptom of an illness.
  - Grimacing in pain or evidence of pain or discomfort that is not easily explained, the onset of a fever of 101 degrees or higher, diarrhea or vomiting lasting more than a few hours, or a rapid change in a person’s behavior.
  - While their life may not be immediately threatened, a person’s signs and symptoms could be potentially serious.

# CALLING 911

- If you determine the situation requires immediate medical attention, call 911.
- Examples include: (not an inclusive list)
  - Bleeding that cannot be controlled
  - Someone who is unconscious
  - A person that has gone into shock
  - A seizure lasting more than 5 minutes
  - A person that has continuous seizures
  - Severe burns
  - Chest pain or pressure
  - Trouble breathing or is breathing in a strange way



If you think you **NEED** to call 911, do it.  
Timeliness in recognizing signs and symptoms  
that require emergency medical treatment  
can be the difference between life and death.

# FALLS

When a person falls always do a body observation, document, and report to your supervisor and home nurse.

Sometimes signs and symptoms can show up a day or two later

If a person's fall was observed and they hit their head, or the fall was unobserved, or if a person reports to you they fell and/or hit their head, complete a head injury report.

Continue to observe for the next 24 hours. TBHS RN/On-call RN need to be called in each of these cases.

# EXAMPLE OF HEAD INJURY ASSESSMENT FORM

## HEAD INJURY ASSESSMENT RECORD

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ CASE#: \_\_\_\_\_ HOME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

AREA OF INJURY: \_\_\_\_\_ RN REVIEW/DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

A Head Injury is defined as an injury to the body anywhere above the neck, including the back of the neck. It is usually caused by a sudden blow, such as a fall to the floor, a punch to the head, an auto accident. Monitor vital functions immediately following an injury, then at the stated time intervals. If monitoring needs to be continued at another location, send this form with the consumer. SIGNS and SYMPTOMS in *italics* may indicate a serious problem and are to be reported immediately.

TIME:										
INTERVALS	STAT	15 MIN	30 MIN	1 HR	2 HR	4 HR				
<b>VITAL SIGNS – <i>Changes in respiration; Slowing of pulse; Rising systolic pressure; Erratic temperature</i></b>										
Blood Pressure	Baseline Vitals									
Pulse										
Respiration's										
Temperature										
<b>LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS – <i>Inability to rouse; Difficulty in speaking</i></b>										
Alert										
Drowsy										
Sleeping										
Able to Rouse										
Changes in Speech										
<b>PUPILS – <i>Unequal pupils; Dilated, non-reactive pupils; Abnormal eye movements</i></b>										
Rt Eye- Equal/Unequal (E/U)										
Rt Eye- Reacts to Light (Y/N)										
Lft Eye- Equal/Unequal (E/U)										
Lft Eye- Reacts to Light (Y/N)										
<b>BEHAVIOR – Check one or more – <i>Confusion; Restlessness; Combativeness</i></b>										
Normal										
Restless										
Confused										
Combative										
<b>ABILITY TO MOVE (Y/N) – <i>Changes in ability to move extremities</i></b>										
Right Arm										
Right Leg										
Left Arm										
Left Leg										
<b>OTHER SIGNS (Y/N) – <i>Presence of any of these symptoms</i></b>										
Vomiting										
Swelling										
Bleeding										
Headache										
Fluid in Ears/ Nose										
Dizziness										
Seizures										
<b>INITIAL/IN EACH SQUARE</b>										
<b>SIGN NAME OF EACH PERSON TAKING VITALS</b>										

- It is vital that you teach the people you support in understanding the importance of maintaining their health.
- It is your responsibility to ensure people are not at unnecessary risk of illness or injury.





**THIS CONCLUDES THE  
OBSERVING SIGNS &  
SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS  
ONLINE TRAINING  
COURSE.**

**IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, PLEASE  
INQUIRE WITH YOUR HOME MANAGER  
OR TBHS NURSE.**

**PLEASE  
PROCEED TO  
THE FINAL  
EXAM AND  
SURVEY TO  
COMPLETE  
THIS  
TRAINING  
COURSE.**

