

Mosby's Nursing Video Skills

Procedure Guideline for Applying Topical Medications

1. Verify the health care provider's orders and compare it with the medication administration record (MAR) twice.
2. Gather the necessary equipment and supplies.
3. Perform hand hygiene.
4. Introduce yourself to the patient and family, if present.
5. Provide for the patient's privacy.
6. Identify the patient using two identifiers, such as name and date of birth or name and account number, according to agency policy. Compare these identifiers with the information on the patient's identification bracelet.
7. Verify the patient's allergies and check the expiration date of the medication.
8. Take the medication to the patient at the correct time (refer to agency policy). Give time-critical medications (i.e., STAT and now doses) at the precise time ordered. During administration, apply the Six Rights of medication administration. Review the video "Six rights of medication administration" if needed.
9. Apply clean gloves. If the patient has any open skin areas, use sterile gloves.
10. Help the patient into a comfortable position.
11. Discuss the purpose of each medication, its action, and possible adverse effects. Allow the patient to ask questions about the drugs.
12. Apply topical creams, ointments, and oil-based lotions:
 - A. Expose the affected area while keeping unaffected areas covered.
 - B. Wash, rinse, and dry the affected area before applying medication.
 - C. If the skin is excessively dry and flaking, apply the topical agent while the skin is still damp.
 - D. Remove your gloves, perform hand hygiene, and apply new clean gloves.
 - E. Place the required amount of medication in the palm of your gloved hand, and warm it by rubbing it briskly between your gloved hands. Spread the medication evenly over the patient's skin using long strokes in the direction of hair growth. You may need to use cotton-tipped applicators for small areas.
 - F. Do not vigorously rub the skin. Apply to the thickness specified by the manufacturer's instructions.
 - G. Explain to the patient that the skin may feel greasy after application.
13. Applying a transdermal patch:
 - A. Apply clean gloves and remove the old patch.
 - B. Fold the sticky sides of the patch together and dispose according to agency policy. Policy may require that the patch be cut in half prior to disposal.
 - C. Use a felt tip marker to note the date, time, and initials of the person applying the new patch.
 - D. Apply clean gloves.
 - E. Apply new patch to a clean, dry area, avoiding the previous site for at least a week. The new site must be relatively free of hair, burns, cuts, or any kind of skin irritation, and must not be too oily.

- F. To apply the new patch, carefully remove the plastic liner by holding the patch around the edges without touching the adhesive.
 - G. Apply the patch immediately to the selected site, pressing it firmly with your hand for 10 seconds to ensure that it adheres well.
 - H. Remove gloves and perform hand hygiene.
14. Administer aerosol sprays (e.g., local anesthetic sprays):
- A. If the area of application is near the face, ask the patient to turn his or her face away from the spray or briefly cover the face with a towel.
 - B. Shake the container vigorously. Read the container label for the recommended distance at which to hold the spray away from the area—usually 15 to 30 cm (6 to 12 inches).
 - C. Spray the medication evenly over the affected site (in some cases, the spray is timed for a period of seconds).
15. Apply a suspension-based lotion:
- A. Put on clean gloves. Shake the container vigorously.
 - B. Apply a small amount of lotion to a small gauze dressing or pad, and apply it to the skin by stroking evenly in the direction of hair growth. Dab the affected area and avoid rubbing vigorously.
 - C. Explain to the patient that the area will feel cool and dry.
16. Apply a powder:
- A. Be sure the skin surface is thoroughly dry. With your nondominant hand, fully spread apart any skin folds, such as between the toes or under the axilla, and dry with a towel.
 - B. If the area of application is near the face, ask the patient to turn his or her face away from the powder or briefly cover the face with a towel.
 - C. Dust the skin site lightly with a dispenser so that the area is covered with a fine, thin layer of powder. *Option:* Cover the skin area with a dressing if ordered to do so by the health care provider.
17. Dispose of soiled supplies in the appropriate trash receptacle, remove and dispose of your gloves, and perform hand hygiene.
18. Help the patient into a comfortable position, and place toiletries and personal items within reach.
19. Place the call light within easy reach, and make sure the patient knows how to use it to summon assistance.
20. To ensure the patient's safety, raise the appropriate number of side rails and lower the bed to the lowest position.
21. Leave the patient's room tidy.
22. Document and report the patient's response and expected or unexpected outcomes.