

NCLEX-RN Cheat Sheet 2026

The night-before summary, built like the exam.

— Questions	5h Time limit	Pass/Fail Passing score
\$200 Exam fee	NCSBN Governing body	

NCLEX-RN Cheat Sheet: Must-Know Priority Frameworks

When a question asks "what does the nurse do first?", walk these hierarchies in order.

- ABCs — Airway -> Breathing -> Circulation. A patent airway always outranks a circulation problem.
- Maslow — Physiological needs before safety, before psychosocial. A physical need (oxygen, fluids, elimination) outranks an emotional one.
- Nursing Process (ADPIE) — Assessment -> Diagnosis -> Planning -> Implementation -> Evaluation. When unsure, assess before you act (unless an ABC intervention is obvious).
- Safety / Least-restrictive — Choose the option that protects the patient without over-restricting.

Delegation: The 5 Rights

Right task, right circumstance, right person, right direction/communication, right supervision.

- RN keeps: assessment, teaching, evaluation, unstable patients, anything requiring nursing judgment.
- LPN/LVN can: stable patients, routine meds (per scope), reinforce teaching, dressing changes.
- UAP/CNA can: ADLs, vitals on stable patients, ambulation, intake/output, positioning.
- Rule of thumb: delegate the stable, routine, and predictable; keep the unstable, novel, and judgment-based.

Vital Sign Reference Ranges (Adult)

- Heart rate: 60–100 bpm
- Respiratory rate: 12–20 breaths/min
- Blood pressure: <120/80 mmHg (normal)
- Temperature: ~98.6°F (37°C)
- SpO2: 95–100%

Key Lab Values

- Sodium (Na⁺): 135–145 mEq/L
- Potassium (K⁺): 3.5–5.0 mEq/L — the "danger" electrolyte; both high and low cause fatal arrhythmias
- Calcium (Ca²⁺): 9.0–10.5 mg/dL
- Magnesium (Mg²⁺): 1.5–2.5 mEq/L
- Chloride (Cl⁻): 98–106 mEq/L
- Fasting glucose: 70–110 mg/dL
- Creatinine: 0.6–1.2 mg/dL
- BUN: 10–20 mg/dL
- Hemoglobin: 12–18 g/dL (F 12–16, M 14–18)
- Hematocrit: 37–52%
- Platelets: 150,000–400,000/μL

- WBC: 5,000–10,000/ μ L
- pH: 7.35–7.45 · PaCO₂ 35–45 mmHg · HCO₃⁻ 22–26 mEq/L
- INR (therapeutic on warfarin): 2.0–3.0

ABG Interpretation (ROME)

R espiratory O pposite, M etabolic E qual.

- Respiratory: pH and PaCO₂ move in opposite directions (downpH + upCO₂ = respiratory acidosis).
- Metabolic: pH and HCO₃⁻ move in the same direction (downpH + downHCO₃⁻ = metabolic acidosis).

Med-Math Formulas

- $\text{Desired} \div \text{Have} \times \text{Quantity} = \text{amount to administer.}$
- $\text{IV drip rate (gtt/min)} = (\text{volume in mL} \times \text{drop factor}) \div \text{time in minutes.}$
- $\text{IV pump rate (mL/hr)} = \text{total volume} \div \text{total hours.}$
- Always double-check units and safe-dose ranges before administering.

High-Alert Safety Rules

- Rights of medication: right patient, drug, dose, route, time, documentation, reason, response.
- Verify identity with two patient identifiers.
- Airborne precautions (negative-pressure room, N95): Measles, TB, Varicella — mnemonic "My Chicken Hez TB" / MTV.
- Droplet precautions: influenza, pertussis, meningitis, mumps, rubella.
- Contact precautions: MRSA, VRE, C. diff (use soap and water — alcohol gel doesn't kill spores).

Position Quick-Reference

- Semi-Fowler's: respiratory distress, post-op, tube feedings (aspiration prevention).
- Left lateral (Sims'): enemas, pregnancy (improves placental perfusion).
- Trendelenburg / supine legs raised: shock/hypotension.
- High-Fowler's: eating, severe dyspnea.
- Flat, no pillow: post-lumbar puncture / spinal.

Test-Taking Strategy

- If two answers are opposites, the correct one is often in that pair.
- Choose assessment over intervention unless an ABC/emergency is stated.
- Never select an answer that abandons or delays care, passes the buck, or asks "why" (avoid "why did you..." therapeutic-communication traps).
- Pick the least invasive, safest effective option first.

Official sources

- National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) — 2026 NCLEX-RN Test Plan (Effective April 2026): https://www.ncsbn.org/public-files/2026_RN_Test-Plan_English-F.pdf
- NCLEX Bootcamp — NCLEX Bootcamp — Pricing (1, 2 and 3 Months of Access): <https://bootcamp.com/nclex/upgrade>
- UWorld Nursing — UWorld NCLEX-RN Review Course: <https://nclex.uworld.com/nclex-rn/>

Free practice questions for this exam: www.everyexamprep.com/exams/nclex-rn/practice-test