



**Measuring respiratory  
rate of an adult :  
Step by step guide**

## Why is respiratory rate important?

The speed at which someone is breathing is a useful indicator of whether they are well or not. A person may be unwell if they are breathing faster or slower than usual. The NHS advises that the normal respiratory rate for an adult is between 12 and 20 breaths per minute.

## Important tip

If possible, try not to let the person know that you are counting their breaths. This is because when a person becomes aware of their breathing, they may start to breathe faster or slower than usual.

## You will need:

A way to accurately count the breaths taken during 60 seconds such as:

- A stopwatch
- A phone stopwatch
- A watch or clock with a seconds hand



## Step 1

To measure someone's respiratory rate, ensure that they are comfortable in their chair or bed.

Watch their chest rise and fall as they breathe in and out.

If it is difficult to see the chest rising with each inhale of breath, you may place your hand gently on the chest to feel it rising and falling.



Count each inhale and exhale, when the chest rises and falls, as one breath.

## Step 2

Using the stopwatch on your phone or the seconds hand on your watch, count how many breaths they take during one minute.

Write down the number of breaths taken over a minute in your notes.



If the respiratory rate is faster or slower than normal, seek appropriate help.



For technical assistance call 01372 899031

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