

Altered Levels of Consciousness – Assessing Your Patient

As health care professionals, sometimes the hardest thing at a stressful scene is figuring out why a patient has an altered mental status. We want to quickly treat the patient but may have limited information of what could possibly be wrong with him/her. Here are some tips and a brief review on assessing altered mental status.

Definition Review

Decreased consciousness (stuporous): unresponsive to pain or painful stimuli

Delirium: altered perception, hallucinations

Lethargy: decreased activity, loss of eye contact

Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS): This is a scale for measuring level of consciousness.

It is helpful to have a chart to quickly figure GCS. There are multiple smart phone apps that quickly calculate a GCS. GCS USquare Soft INC and CliniCalc Medical Calculator are two examples of such apps. A Glasgow Coma Scale is on page two of this document.

Mnemonics can be very helpful, and aid in relieving some stress. Let's review "AEIOU TIPS."

- A** - Alcohol/Acidosis
- E** - Endocrine, Epilepsy, Electrolytes, Encephalopathy
- I** - Infection
- O** - Opiates, Overdose
- U** - Uremia, UTI
- T** - Trauma (head injury, blood loss, or shock)
- I** - Insulin
- P** - Poisoning/Psychosis
- S** - Stroke

Labs, vitals, assessment, history, stroke scale, glucometer, CT scan, and a lumbar puncture are further interventions and diagnostic tools to further aid in identifying the etiology of an altered mental status.

AIR LINK
REGIONAL WEST

4021 Avenue B | Scottsbluff, NE 69361 | 1.800.252.2215





Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS):

Category		Best Response
Eye opening		
Spontaneous		4
To speech		3
To pain		2
None		1
Verbal	(Modified for Infants)	
Oriented	Babbles	5
Confused	Irritable	4
Inappropriate words	Cries to pain	3
Moans	Moans	2
None	None	1
Motor		
Follows commands		6
Localizes to pain		5
Withdraws to pain		4
Abnormal flexion		3
Abnormal extension		2
None		1
Glasgow Coma Score		
Best possible score		15
Worst possible score		3
If tracheally intubated then verbal designated with "T"		
Best possible score while intubated		10T
Worst possible score while intubated		2T