



Quick Guide to the Physical Exam for the  
7-Point Subjective Global Assessment

# Tips for Conducting a Physical Exam

- Before working with patients – **Practice, Practice, Practice!**
  - ✓ Co-workers, family, friends can all be used for practice to build your confidence
- Before you begin:
  - ✓ Wash your hands
  - ✓ Make sure you have appropriate PPE (gloves, mask, gown, etc.)
- For the exam:
  - Respect patient privacy
    - ✓ Conduct exam in a private space
    - ✓ Expose areas of body only as needed
  - Talk with the patient:
    - ✓ Introduce/reintroduce yourself
    - ✓ Explain what you will be doing
    - ✓ Ask for permission to touch them
    - ✓ Continue to explain as you go through the exam
    - ✓ Use the opportunity to clarify any questions you have about other components to the 7-point SGA – diet, functional status, etc.



# Muscle Wasting

6 Areas to Assess



- Muscle wasting is evaluated on a scale of 1-7 with **1 being severe depletion** and **7 indicating no depletion** in all areas
- There are 6 areas that can be examined to assess for muscle wasting. The 7-Point Subjective Global Assessment requires the presence of muscle wasting to be evident in at least 3 areas
- The upper body is more susceptible to muscle wasting
- Muscle wasting is more significant than subcutaneous fat loss.

# Temple



**Normal** - The muscle should be well defined with no scooping or hollowing

- **Observe patient from the front, as well as each side.**
- **Look for prominence of the brow bone.**



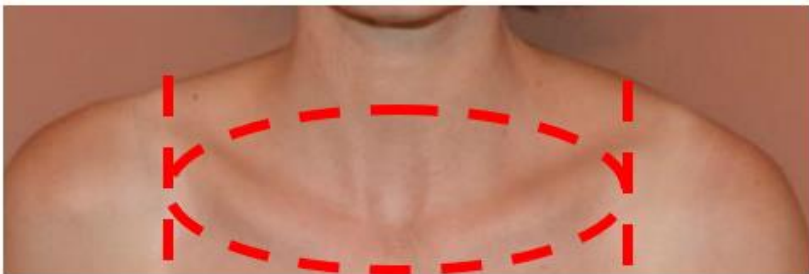
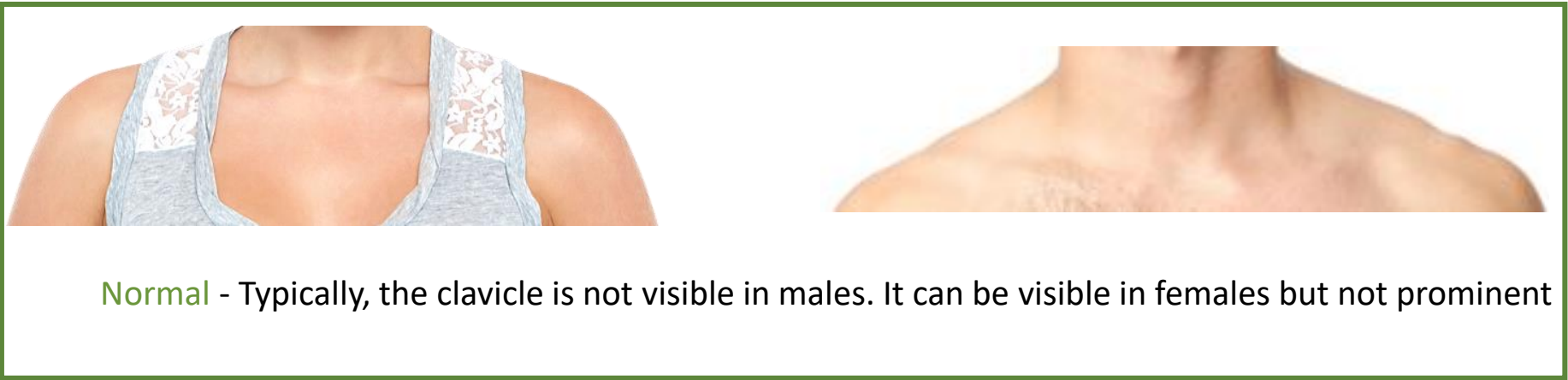
Mild/Moderate  
Slight depression or indentation



Severe  
Hollowing, obvious depression

# Clavicle

➤ **Observe the pectoral and deltoid muscle.**



**Mild**  
Some protrusion  
Not all the way along the clavicle



**Moderate**  
Some protrusion along the whole clavicle



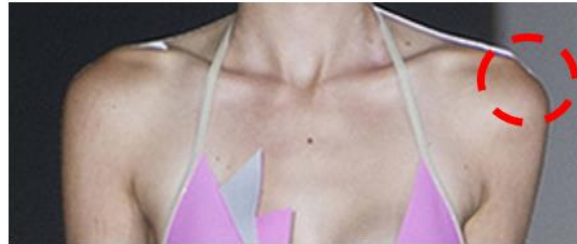
**Severe**  
Clear protrusion, prominent bone

# Shoulders

- **Observe straight on with their arms at their sides.**



**Normal** - Shoulders should be rounded with curves at the junction of the shoulder/neck and shoulder/arm



Mild/Moderate - No square look  
Acromion process may protrude slightly.



Severe – Square look  
Bones prominent

# Ribs/Scapula



Normal - Chest should be full; ribs should not show.

- Observe patient from back
- It may help to have them press their hands hard against a solid wall



## Mild/Moderate

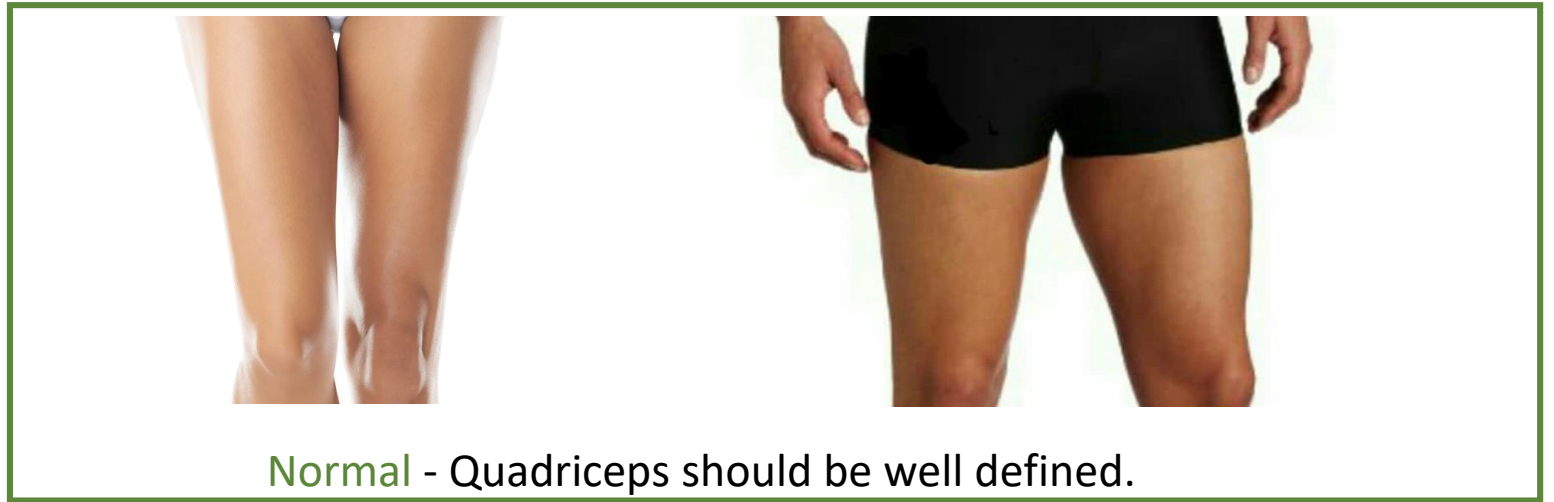
Mild depressions or bone may show slightly; not in all areas.

## Severe

Bones prominent, severe depression

# Quadriceps

➤ Observe the leg straight on



Mild/Moderate  
Depression/atrophy medially



Severe – Prominent knees, severe depression medially



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# Interosseous Muscle

➤ Observe the hand on the side of the thumb



**Normal** - The muscle will bulge or in some cases, typically in women, it will be flat.



Mild/Moderate  
Slightly depressed



Severe – Flat or severely depressed area



# Fat Stores

- Loss of fat stores is evaluated on a scale of 1-7 with 1 being severe depletion and 7 indicating no depletion in all areas.
- There are 3 areas used to assess for wasting or loss of subcutaneous fat deposits.
- Age-related loss of subcutaneous tissue may confound your findings.

## 3 Areas to Assess

Ribs, lower back,  
and sides of trunk



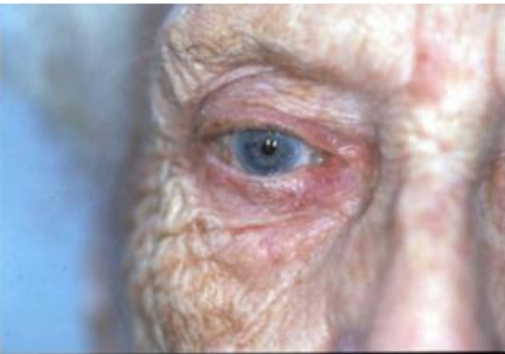
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# Orbital Pads

- Observe patient by standing directly in front of them
- Touch just above the cheekbone



Normal - Fat pads should slightly bulge. Note fluid retention may mask loss



Mild/Moderate

Slightly dark circles, somewhat hollow look



Severe

Hollow look, depressions, dark circles, loose skin



# Ribs, Lower Back, and Sides of Trunk

- **Observe patient from the back**
- **May help to have them press their hands hard against a wall**



**Normal** - Ample fat tissue, chest wall and ribs should not be visible. There may be a slight protrusion of the iliac crest.



**Mild/Moderate**  
Ribs apparent but depressions less pronounced, iliac crest somewhat prominent



**Severe**  
Skin is stretched; prominent, well-defined ribs

# Triceps



**Normal** - Ample fat tissue is obvious between folds of skin.

- **Observe patient with their arm bent**
- **Roll skin in between fingers**
- **Do not include muscle in pinch.**



**Mild/Moderate**  
Some depth in pinch but not ample



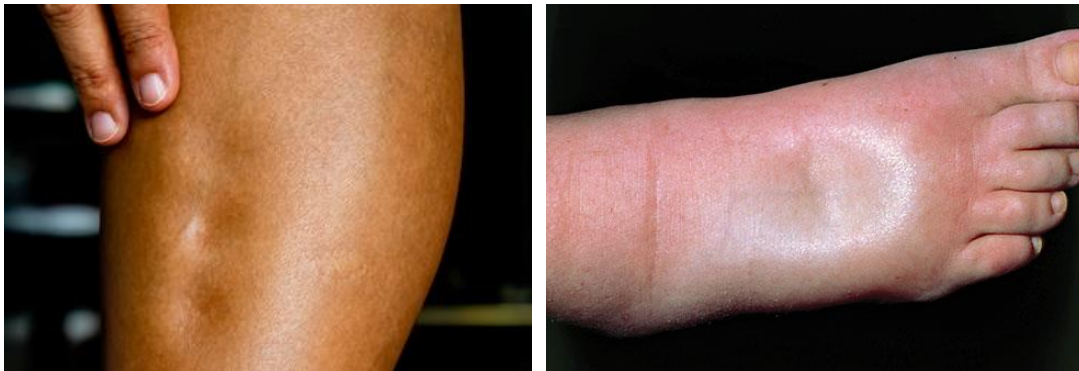
**Severe**  
Very little space between folds,  
fingers touch

# Edema

- Observe and palpate extremities for fluid retention
- Use this opportunity to discuss patient's history of edema



Normal – No edema



Mild/Moderate

Pitting edema of extremities/pitting to knees, possible sacral edema if bed ridden



Severe

Pitting beyond knees, sacral edema if bed ridden  
May also have generalized edema including swelling around the eyes or other parts of the upper body.