7.1: Sensory Impairments Introduction

Learning Objectives

- Collect data to identify patients experiencing alterations in sensory perception
- Identify factors related to sensory impairments across the life span
- Demonstrate respect for the dignity of the patient with a sensory impairment
- Detail support for family/significant others caring for patients with a sensory impairment
- Include community resources available for patients and families with a sensory impairment
- Include adaptations to the environment to maintain safety for the patient with a sensory impairment
- Incorporate nursing strategies to maximize sensory perception
- Outline nursing interventions for specific sensory disorders
- Identify evidence-based practices

Our five basic senses of sight (vision), hearing (auditory), touch (tactile), smell (olfactory), and taste (gustatory) help us perceive and act in the world around us. See Figure 7.1 for an illustration of our five senses.
Figure 7.1 Five Senses

We may not often consider the importance of our sensory input. As nurses, we especially rely on our senses when providing patient care as we gather assessment data. We ask questions and listen to patient responses, we listen to their heart and lung sounds, we evaluate the appearance of their skin, we may smell an infectious process when changing a wound dressing, and we feel the sensation of pulses when assessing circulation.

When an individual experiences sensory impairment because of the loss of one or more senses or is affected by the amount of stimuli (too much or too little), their ability to safely function is impacted. Nurses identify patients’ sensory impairments and implement interventions to improve their safety, functioning, and quality of life. The nurse’s goal is to provide support and dignity to individuals and their families by using strategies and resources that will help them to engage with their surroundings and others to the best of their ability.

This chapter will review common sensory impairments and related nursing care.

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