

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs – NCLEX Cheat Sheet



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Use this cheat sheet to help you prioritize nursing care using Maslow's Hierarchy on the NCLEX. Always address the lowest unmet need in the hierarchy FIRST.

1. Physiological Needs (Highest Priority)

- • Airway obstruction / Stridor
- • Hypoxia / Low SpO₂
- • Chest pain / MI symptoms
- • Dehydration / Electrolyte imbalance
- • Hypoglycemia
- • Pain requiring intervention
- • Urinary retention
- • Sleep deprivation
- • Tube feeding or NPO status
- • Seizure activity

2. Safety and Security Needs

- • Fall risk / Bed alarms
- • Seizure precautions
- • Suicide precautions
- • Infection control / Isolation
- • Medication error prevention
- • Domestic violence / Abuse
- • Staffing/supervision issues
- • Restraint protocols
- • Environmental hazards
- • Confused patient wandering

3. Love and Belonging Needs

- • Social isolation
- • Family conflict
- • Grieving or loss
- • Interrupted family processes
- • Therapeutic communication
- • Lack of support system
- • Patient abandonment feelings
- • Separation anxiety
- • Bonding issues (e.g. postpartum)
- • Peer support or counseling needed



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4. Esteem Needs

- • Body image disturbance
- • Loss of independence
- • Low self-esteem
- • Noncompliance due to shame
- • Job loss concerns
- • Fear of disfigurement
- • Feeling like a burden
- • Impaired role performance
- • Self-care deficit
- • Performance anxiety

5. Self-Actualization (Lowest Priority)

- • Spiritual distress
- • Desire to volunteer / give back
- • Legacy concerns
- • Creative expression needs
- • Life review / life purpose discussion
- • Coping with terminal illness gracefully
- • Bucket list requests
- • Advanced directive planning
- • Career fulfillment desires
- • Self-reflection goals