



# CMSRN Certification Review Course Workbook

**CMSRN®**

## **Lesson 1**

### **Introduction and Testing Strategies**

The Certified Medical-Surgical Registered Nurse (CMSRN®) certification program is administered by the Medical-Surgical Nursing Certification Board (MSNCB), AMSN's partner organization.

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# Medical-Surgical Nursing Certification Review Workbook

## Lesson 1 - Introduction & Testing Strategies

### About the Certification Exam

**150 Multiple-Choice Questions**

**NOT** "progressive" like state boards

Answer **ALL** questions

Apply any time

90 days to schedule and take exam

**3-Hour Exam**



**Computer-Based Testing Format**

**125 Scored  
25 Un-scored**

300+ testing locations nationwide

Live remote proctoring

Schedule **ASAP**

Receive Pass/Fail result immediately

Standard Passing Score = 95 (71%)

For more information [www.AMSN.org](http://www.AMSN.org)

The exam only tests your knowledge of frequent, or typical, patient problems and roles med-surg nurses face across the country.

Every exam question focuses on two areas:

Patient Problems based on body systems and diseases.

Nursing Domains of Nursing Practice, or med-surg nursing roles and required interventions based on the care needs of your patients.

CMSRN Exam Blueprint Every question addresses these two areas.		Domains of Practice							
		1 Administering Nursing Interventions	2 Diagnostic/Patient Monitoring	3 Helping Role	4 Teaching/Coaching	5 Managing Emergency	6 Organization/Work Role Competency	7 Ensuring Quality	
Patient Problem	A. Gastrointestinal	6-8	6-8	4-6	4-6	2-4	1-3	0-1	24-27 16-18%
	B. Pulmonary	5-7	5-6	3-5	3-5	2-4	1-3	0-1	22-26 15-17%
	C. Cardiovascular/Hematological	6-8	5-6	3-5	3-5	2-4	1-3	0-1	24-27 16-18%
	D. Diabetes (Type 1&2)/Other Endocrine/Immunological	5-6	4-5	3-4	3-4	1-3	0-1	0-1	27-30 18-20%
	E. Urological/Kidney	4-5	4-5	3-4	3-4	1-3	0-1	0-1	21-24 14-16%
	F. Musculoskeletal/Neurological/Integumentary	5-7	4-6	3-4	3-4	1-3	0-1	0-1	22-26 15-17%
		36-39 24-26%	34-38 23-25%	24-27 16-18%	22-26 15-17%	16-20 11-13%	4-8 3-5%	1-5 1-3%	# Questions (Out of 150) % Questions (100% Total)

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## Most Prevalent on Exam

### Patient Problems

- Represented almost equally.
- NOTE: Not all correct answers are just disease related. The correct answer may relate to what your role should be in the given scenario.

### Nursing Domains

- Not equally distributed,
- Number of questions in descending order from the most prevalent to the least prevalent.

### Use the CMSRN Exam blueprint to target your study time on:

- Patient Problem areas and Nursing Practice Roles you need to review.
- Most prevalent exam questions.

## Not on the Exam

- Care of patients who are on ventilators.
- Immediate postoperative care of patients with open-heart or transplant surgery
- Care of patients during monitored conscious sedation analgesia.
- Care of patients during hemodialysis

## Your Checklist

Use the following topic checklist to identify the subject matter you would like to revisit, find challenging, or needs additional review prior to the exam. It's important to write these down while the information is fresh in your mind.

The checked items will help you plan your additional study time beyond this lesson.



### About the Certification Exam Activity

Place a check mark on the Patient Problems and Domains of Nursing Practice you find challenging or need additional review time.

#### Patient Problems

- Gastrointestinal
- Pulmonary
- Cardiovascular/Hematological
- Diabetes (Type 1&2), Other  
Endocrine/Immunological
- Urological/Kidney
- Musculoskeletal/Neurological/  
Integumentary

#### Domains of Practice

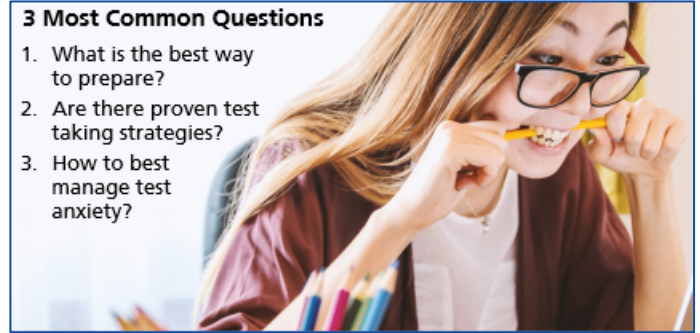
- Administering Nursing Interventions
- Diagnostic/Patient Monitoring
- Helping Role
- Teaching/Coaching
- Managing Emergency
- Organization/Work Role Competency
- Ensuring Quality

## Preparation & Test-Taking Strategies

Give yourself plenty of time to prepare. Our brain needs both repetition and time to move information from short-term memory to long-term memory. A study plan does just that.

### 3 Most Common Questions

1. What is the best way to prepare?
2. Are there proven test taking strategies?
3. How to best manage test anxiety?



## Exam Preparation

**Be confident.**

**Review available resources.**

**Make a personal study plan.**

**Getting started is the hardest part. Know how to overcome the temptation to procrastinate.** To make a study plan:

1. Identify and prioritize resources.
2. Estimate resource completion time.
3. Schedule days, times, goals, and places in a calendar.

**Follow your plan.**



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## Scheduling Considerations

- Structure time to maximize learning. Study when most alert.
- Choose study locations with minimal distractions and more control over environmental factors.
- Consider other ways to study and identify what works for you.
- Schedule frequent study periods in one-hour increments.
- Identify a goal for each study session.
- Be realistic. Use the exam blueprint to refine your focus areas.
- Schedule regular and frequent times to study.
- Pace your studying. Stop studying when you start to feel overwhelmed.

**There are 2 steps to achieving a goal: planning & executing.  
A plan without execution gets you nowhere,  
but so does random execution without a plan.**

## Your Preparation Checklist

Your  
Checklist



### Preparation Strategies

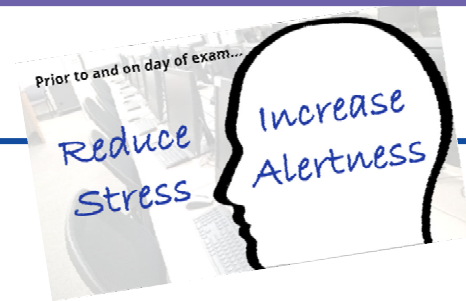
Place a checkmark next to the exam preparation tasks you have accomplished.

- Be confident.** The exam only covers real-world clinical situations you already know and do in your job.
  - You already have the knowledge.
  - Know exam structure.
  
- Review available resources.**
  - Know exam structure and what to expect.
  - Leverage blueprint information. Know the number of questions to expect on each body system, patient problem, and most prevalent content areas.
  - Review content areas using the remaining lessons of this review course and materials used to develop the exam.
  - Complete practice questions that have direct impact on the exam score.
  - Use additional resources available on AMSN website and on this lesson's Resources tab.
  
- Make a personal study plan.**
  - When will you make your study plan? \_\_\_\_\_
  - Prioritize content to review. Complete review lessons, practice questions/exams, etc.
  - Estimate completion time for each.
  - Schedule in your calendar regular/frequent study sessions. Include time, duration, and what to accomplish.
  
- Follow your plan. What execution tasks will use to stay on track?**
  - Refer to study plan regularly.
  - Take breaks to prevent feeling tired, overwhelmed, or discouraged.
  - If overwhelmed, break material into to smaller parts.
  - Eliminate all distractions including phone, TV, foot traffic, computer.
  - If having difficulty remembering, write it down.
  - Stick to your schedule. Be realistic.
  - Identify incentives for completing each study session.

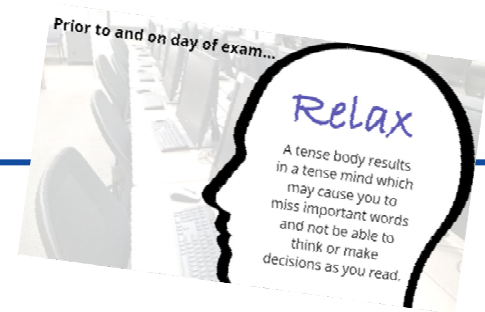


## Test-Taking Strategies

In addition to having a solid command of the exam structure and subject matter, use proven test-taking techniques and strategies during the exam.



- Get enough rest.
- Don't cram, it's not worth it.
- Exercise before the exam to sharpen and clear your mind.
- Wear comfortable, layered clothing.
- Arrive at test site 10–15 minutes early.
- Eat to fuel your brain and to improve alertness and stamina.



### Nutritional Dos

- Complex carbohydrates (pasta, yogurt) settle nerves.
- Drink plenty of water. Stay hydrated.
- Vitamin C and citrus fruits calm short-term stress.
- Protein, K+, Ca+ improve ability to handle long-term stress.
- Peppermint, cinnamon, lemon are flavors that enhance learning and sharpen minds!

### Nutritional Don'ts

- Avoid alcohol and excessive caffeine.
- Avoid spicy, fatty, and high sugar foods. They make you sluggish, heavy, fatigued, and can cause indigestion.

## Exam Question Strategy

### CASE 1 Questions 1-3

**46-year-old patient** A 46-year-old patient, has a long history of ulcerative colitis, and non-surgical treatment no longer relieved symptoms. The patient underwent total proctocolectomy and a permanent ileostomy 12 hours ago.

- 1 The nurse should contact the physician **immediately** if the patient has which of these findings?
- The stoma appears pale and dry.
  - The stoma appears red and shiny.
  - There is 200 mL of dark green output from the stoma.
  - There is 50 mL of serosanguinous drainage from the stoma.

## Read and dissect case study questions systematically.

- Find and identify the question in the scenario.
- Read the case study, and act out the situation in your mind.
  - Answer will be "textbook."
  - Look for key words.
  - Look for clues.
  - Don't read information into the question that isn't there.
  - Don't make assumptions based on what you typically do in your practice.
  - Always think about evidence-based care.

## Look for these Nursing Key Words

Key Words	Most, first, initially, immediately, late, toxicity vs. side effect, complications, usual problem, least, except
Words Related to the Nursing Process	Assessment, analysis, plan, intervention, evaluation
Words Related to Time Parameters	Day one vs. day three, preop vs. postop, during, after
Absolutes	Always, never, every, none, all
Words of Essence	Acute vs. chronic, partial vs. total or names of disease
Locations	Emergency units, hospitals, neuro units, post anesthesia units
Distracters	Mystery diseases, absurd situations, content that clashes with your personal beliefs or fundamental principles

## Question Dissection – Practice Questions

### Practice Question 1 of 5

A patient begins to experience a severe GI bleed.

The plan of care to meet the patient's fluid needs should include, as a priority, planning for which of the following?

- a) Provision for skin care
- b) Monitoring vital signs frequently
- c) Decreasing pH of gastric fluids
- d) Rapid infusion of IV fluids and blood

**How to dissect this question:**

### Practice Question 2 of 5

A patient is having seizure activity.

What should the nurse do during this activity?

- a) Insert an oropharyngeal airway
- b) Promote safety of body systems
- c) Protect the patients head on a pillow
- d) Observe the length and after effects of the seizure

**How to dissect this question:**

### Practice Question 3 of 5

A patient in acute kidney failure develops acute pulmonary edema.

Which of the following interventions would be inappropriate to include in the patient's care?

- a) Administration of oxygen at 3 L/min per nasal cannula
- b) Administration of morphine and furosemide (Lasix)
- c) Placing the patient in high Fowler's position
- d) Replacing fluids with normal saline

**How to dissect this question:**

### Practice Question 4 of 5

A patient is admitted with peripheral vascular disease. Legs are pale and cool, and the nurse palpated weak pedal pulses. The patient complains of pain when walking that does resolve with resting for about 5 minutes.

Which of the following interventions should the nurse do for this patient?

- a) Elevate the legs
- b) Keep the legs at the level of the heart
- c) Provide pain medication prior to ambulating
- d) Check for a positive Homan's sign

**How to dissect this question:**

### Practice Question 5 of 5

An 86-year-old patient is admitted after having been found lying on the living room floor. This patient has been diagnosed with a right-sided stroke.

**The nurse, working with a student nurse to admit this person, has to do some teaching with that student when the following statement is made.**

- a) Because this is a right-sided stroke, the patient won't have any problems with speech.
- b) Because this is a right-sided stroke, it is the left side of the brain that is affected.
- c) As the patient has had a stroke, they will probably need to have a swallowing study done before feeding.
- d) We need to find out whether the patient is right or left handed.

**How to dissect this question:**

## Your Test-Taking Strategies Checklist

### Testing Strategies

Place checkmarks next to strategies you would like to use during the exam.

Your  
Checklist



- Reduce stress and increase alertness prior to & on exam day.**
  - Enter stress reducing reminders in your calendar.
  - Get enough rest.
  - Don't cram, it's not worth it.
  - Exercise before the exam to sharpen and clear your mind.
  - Wear comfortable layered clothing.
  - Arrive at test site 10–15 minutes early.
  - Eat to fuel your brain, improve alertness and stamina.
- Test Taking Tips & Tricks**
  - Read directions carefully.
  - Answer every question. Wrong answers do not distract from your score.
  - Avoid "I don't know" initial response.
  - Reread questions with negative words: "not" or "least".
  - Pay attention to details. Names, dates, or other details can make content inaccurate.
  - Pay attention to grammatical matching. Two similar answers are not usually correct.
  - Look for qualifying words. Modest words are more likely true: "sometimes, often, many, few, generally, etc. Stricter words are often false: "always" or "never".
  - Be alert for multiple ideas or concepts within question alternatives.
  - Think of answer before reading options.
  - Have a sound reason for changing your original answer.
  - Place a mark in the margin, then return to the question to recheck your answer.
  - When guessing an answer...
    - Avoid lingering too long on any one question.
    - Identify problematic or doubtful questions.
    - Identify lengthy or highly specific answers. They could be the correct answer.
    - Note that extreme words are more likely to be incorrect: "always", "never", "only", "must", "completely".
    - Eliminate highly implausible answers first.
    - Don't think about a previous question while reading a new one.
- Question Strategy**
  - Read and dissect each question systematically. Refer to process.
  - Look for key words and clues.
  - Avoid reading information into the question that isn't there.
  - Don't make assumptions based on what you typically do.
  - Always think about evidence-based care

## Test Anxiety

Identify the possible causes, symptoms and ways to control your test anxiety before and during the exam.

### Causes

- Prior negative test-taking experiences
- Fear of failure
- Lack of preparation
- Poor time management
- Worrying about test anxiety
- Poor study habits
- Lack of organization
- Cramming versus following a structured plan
- Inability to anticipate what the exam will cover.
- Lack of confidence
- Negative thought processes
- Pressure to perform well.
- Perfectionism and feelings of unworthiness leading to unreasonable goals.
- Self-esteem vs. Performance
- Focusing on negative consequences of failure rather than preparing to succeed

### Symptoms

- Headaches
- Nausea
- Extreme body temperature changes
- Excessive sweating
- Shortness of breath
- Light-headedness
- Rapid heart rate
- Dry mouth
- Pending disappointment
- Depression
- Anger
- High levels of emotion (crying, laughing, etc.)
- Feelings of helplessness
- Racing thoughts
- Going blank
- Difficulty concentrating
- Negative self-talk
- Feelings of dread
- Comparing yourself to others
- Difficulty organizing thoughts.
- Fidgeting
- Pacing
- Substance abuse
- Avoidance

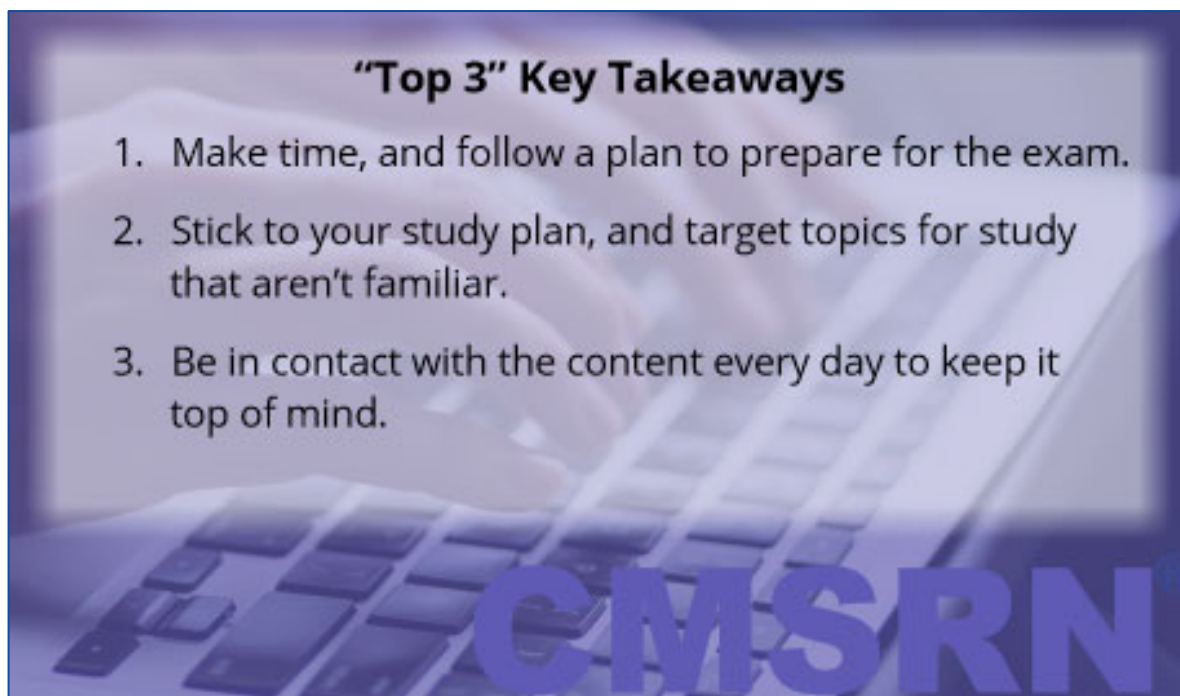
### Tips to Control & Harness

- Keep the exam in perspective.
- Be prepared and create a study plan.
- Set reasonable expectations.
- Spread studying over several days.
- Study regularly.
- Take practice tests.
- Reward yourself for dedicated studying.
- Don't arrive to the test too early.
- Don't get distracted by others during the test.
- Bring everything you need on test day.
- Keep a positive attitude. Avoid negative or irrational thoughts.
- Control fear with positive self-talk: Change "I can't do it." to "I can do it." "I don't know." to "I do know, and I do it in my present job."
- Learn and practice relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing and visualization.
- Be healthy; get adequate rest; eat well and exercise to build energy.

- Learn more about test anxiety by reading these articles:
  - Cramming & Test Anxiety
  - Test Anxiety
  - Managing Test Anxiety

## Lesson Summary

### Key Takeaways



Remember to put the exam in perspective and be confident in your knowledge as a medical-surgical nurse.

### Resources

- AMSN Website: <https://amsn.org>
- CMSRN website: <https://www.msncb.org/>
- AMSN Med-Surg Certification Preparation Resources: <https://www.amsn.org/certification/cmsrn-resources-prep-materials>.
- Scope & Standards of Medical-Surgical Nursing: <https://www.amsn.org/publications/scope-and-standards>.

The following are downloadable pdf documents from the online Lesson 9 Resources link:

- Cramming and Test Anxiety
- Domains of Medical-Surgical Nursing Practice
- Make Test Anxiety Work for You
- Managing Test Anxiety
- National Guidelines for Nursing Delegation
- Use the Teach Back Method