

## 10 Hot Tips for Passing the ACLS Exam

Here is a guide to help you improve your chances of passing the certification exam for ACLS – Advanced Cardiac Life Support. If you take the advice given here seriously, you will do very well on the exam. But you must allow yourself plenty of time to learn all of this material – especially if you are new to this.

### 1. Study and memorize the *Zombie Notes Study Charts*

The *Zombie Notes Study Charts* focus on information from the literature, test questions and the real life everyday situations - information you need to provide safe care during an adult emergency or cardiac arrest. As you read the study guide, try to memorize the medications and their doses. You must memorize and understand the algorithms; the arrhythmias and in which situations treatments and medications may be required. Memorizing the algorithms, bradycardia – heart blocks and drug doses is the most difficult part. Repeating the information over and over, and even saying it aloud really helps with the memorization. Once the hard part is memorized, you can start using critical thinking in adjusting treatments based on patient symptoms. The *Zombie Notes* helps you study the need to know and it is easy to take with you to study in your spare time.

### 2. Read and study the *ECC Handbook*

The *American Heart Association* textbook or the *ECC Handbook* may be distributed by your instructor. The AHA - ECC handbook is an excellent source for evidenced based treatment protocols for all age groups in emergency situations. It will assist the learner in identifying in priority the steps to take, meds to give,

joules to use, essential equipment to have and post arrest recommendations to stabilize the patient. This will help you in the mega code setting to apply your knowledge and skills. The handbook is filled with information of topics around assessing and treatment of critical situations, shock states, airway management, treatments and pharmacological modalities.

### 3. Understand basic EKGs

ACLS course focuses on the patient's heart rate and rhythm throughout the course. The treatments you select will be in response to your accurate choice of arrhythmia and if the patient is stable or unstable. Taking an EKG course is probably the most important preparation for ACLS class and testing. There are a variety of ways to take a course. A classroom setting, an easy to understand textbook, or an on line program are great options. YOU MUST be able to recognize and treat the lethal arrhythmias in the patient: ventricular fibrillation, ventricular tachycardia (with or without a pulse), pulseless electrical activity (PEA), and asystole.

### 4. Watch YouTube videos on EKG and other ACLS topics

Any critically ill patient of any age may have their heart rate and rhythm affected. Trauma, age, medications, dehydration, heart failure, and heredity all play a part in a patient's arrhythmia. It is the practitioner's role to recognize potential cardiac changes and treat appropriately. Knowing the difference in synchronized and unsynchronized cardioversion (shock) is important. Other important rhythms to know are: bradycardia – 4 heart blocks; sinus tachycardia; supraventricular tachycardia (SVT).

## 5. Take ACLS practice tests over and over until you get every question correct

Practice tests can reinforce what you know and help you find the areas you need to focus your studies.

## 6. Take a BLS course and be sure you can perform high-quality-CPR at the ACLS class

The prerequisite to any Certification Course is the ability to perform BLS skills. The instructor may ask you for your card. During the ACLS course you will have to perform in practice and testing sessions. Some of the BLS skills will include: quick assessment for patient's response and pulse (10 seconds); chest compressions for adults; ventilations using a bag-mask-valve (Ambu bag); the AED and application of AED pads.

## 7. Review all the ACLS medications and their doses

Oxygen, epinephrine, amiodarone, adenosine, atropine, and procainamide, etc., are used throughout the ACLS program. Oxygen, epinephrine, and amiodarone are the most frequently used drugs in an emergency. Lidocaine is no longer in the algorithms. The new drugs listed (or drugs back in the recommendations) are procainamide, sotolol, cardiac catheterization drugs, anticoagulants, platelet inhibitors, sedatives, and fibrinolytic agents.

## 8. Read about different diagnosis

Knowing the common diagnosis - dehydration, respiratory failure, septic and cardiogenic shock,

trauma, etc. - and the common treatments will ready you for the practice scenarios and testing mega codes. There are algorithms and guidelines to follow for the different diagnosis. Many are the standard of care nationally and world-wide - as in MI and stroke. Treating shock and trauma involves many treatment protocols and medical disciplines to bring a patient to a stable condition. There are algorithms to assist the professionals in developing priorities around trauma: triage, transport, stroke and neurological assessments (Glasgow Coma Scale), wounds, fractures, paralysis, and burns. Shock priorities include fluid replacement, electrolyte balance, vasoconstrictors, and vasodilators.

## 9. Be prepared to work in a team setting and be able to participate verbally with hands-on participation

You may be assigned to a different role in the mega code. You may be practicing skills that your scope of practice does not allow in the work place. The skills allowed in the classroom, allows you to see how we can help each other in an emergency situation. Feel free to speak up when the instructor allows team-work. Also be prepared to run a mega code as the team leader as well.

## 10. Participate in class, and ask and answer lots of questions

Speaking up and asking many questions helps you understand and will facilitate your classrooms ask more detailed questions as well.



Watch Michele's YouTube videos that go with this study guide:

- ACLS Orientation
- ACLS 2010 Updates
- ACLS Zombie Notes

See our other Zombie Notes Study Charts at [DicksonKeanaghan.com](http://DicksonKeanaghan.com)



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