

SKIN HEALTH



Winnipeg Regional Health Authority
Office régional de la santé de Winnipeg
Caring for Health À l'écoute de notre santé

PRESSURE ULCER PREVENTION

INFORMATION FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

What is a pressure ulcer?

A pressure ulcer (or “bedsore”) is an injury to the skin and tissues below the skin. It is usually caused by sitting or lying in one position for too long.

They usually occur on the buttocks, hips, heels, elbows and shoulders, which are bony and take most of the pressure when you are lying in bed or sitting. Pressure ulcers begin as red or purple areas, but can progress to damage the skin and deeper tissues if not treated.

What causes a pressure ulcer?

Constant pressure on the skin decreases blood flow and leads to tissue damage from a lack of oxygen and nutrients. Sliding down in a bed or chair stretches the skin and tissues and may also lead to a pressure ulcer. Even rubbing or friction on the skin may cause damage or make a minor pressure ulcer worse.

What increases the risk?

difficulty moving or changing positions • frequent or long periods where skin is in contact with urine and stool • not eating or drinking enough • confusion that limits moving and changing position • decreased feeling in the skin • health conditions like diabetes and poor circulation

Key steps to prevent a pressure ulcer

The following suggestions may be helpful to prevent pressure ulcers. Because each person's needs are different, please discuss these options with your health care provider.

Avoid long periods of pressure

- When in bed, roll over and change position often. If you can't do this, ask someone to help you change position at least every two hours.
- When sitting, shift your weight or change position every 15 minutes. If you can't do this, ask someone to help you change position at least once an hour.

Did you know?

Pressure ulcers can happen within a few hours and can be serious. They can lead to...pain • possible complications such as infection • longer periods of bed rest • surgery

Confined to bed?

- Avoid raising the head of the bed as much as possible. If you need to raise the head of the bed for certain activities or it is needed for your health, raise it to the lowest point possible for as short a time as possible.
- Use pillows or foam wedges to keep your knees and ankles from pressing against each other.
- When on your side, avoid lying directly on your hip bone – roll back slightly onto your buttock.
- When on your back, keep your heels off the bed by placing a pillow under your calves – be careful not to place pillows behind the knees.

Confined to a wheelchair?

- Talk to your healthcare provider about getting a wheelchair and cushion that meets your needs to reduce pressure while sitting.
- Avoid sitting on slings used for transfer.

Reduce friction

- When changing position or moving in bed, don't drag or pull yourself across the sheets, and don't push or pull with your heels or elbows. Instead, roll or lift with your body.
- Avoid repetitive movements like rubbing your feet on the sheets to scratch an itchy spot.

Stay active

- Walk, move and do as much for yourself as possible.
- Tell your health care provider if pain is keeping you from moving.

Take care of your skin

- Inspect your skin at least once per day. If you notice any red, purple, painful or open areas of skin, stay off of the area and notify your healthcare provider as soon as possible.
- Prevent dry skin by using moisturising creams.
- Don't rub or massage skin if it is red or purple.
- Immediately clean urine or stool from your skin to prevent skin breakdown.
- Avoid doughnut-shaped cushions – they can cause injury to deep tissues.

Protect your skin from heat and moisture

- If leaking urine or stool is a problem, talk to your healthcare provider about how to avoid leakage. Use absorbent pads or briefs to pull moisture away from your body.
- Apply an extra protective cream or ointment to protect your skin from urine and/or stool.
- Minimize layers of linens/padding under your body.

Look after your health

- Eat a well-balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids.

Questions? Contact your health care provider.

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