

Skin Health: Help Us Protect Your Skin and Prevent Pressure Ulcers



Information for you and your family

What is a pressure ulcer?

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

These ulcers usually occur on the buttocks, hips, heels, elbows and shoulders because they are boney 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.

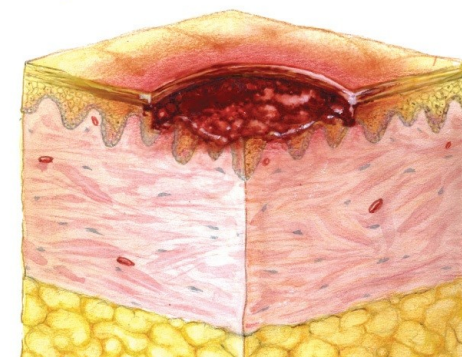
What causes a pressure ulcer?

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

Pressure ulcers can happen within a few hours



Pressure ulcers are serious and can lead to:

- ♦ Pain
- ♦ Slower recovery from health problems
- ♦ Possible complications such as infection
- ♦ Longer periods of bedrest
- ♦ Surgery to heal a pressure ulcer

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 yourself, 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 yourself, ask someone to help you change position at least once an hour.

Reduce Friction:

- ◆ When changing position or moving in bed, don't pull or drag yourself across the sheets and don't push/pull with your heels or elbows. Instead, roll or lift your body.
- ◆ Avoid repetitive movements like rubbing your foot 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 moisturizing creams.
- ◆ Don't rub or massage skin if it is red or purple.
- ◆ Immediately clean urine and 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 health care provider about how to avoid leakage and 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 underneath you

If you have questions please contact your health care provider

The information presented in this brochure is intended as a guideline based on research and evidence informed best practices.

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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, try to keep your heels off the bed by placing a pillow under your calves - be careful not to place pillows behind the knees.

If you use a wheelchair:

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

Look after your health:

- ◆ Eat a well balanced diet.
- ◆ Drink plenty of fluids.