

Tissue Viability Team

How to prevent pressure ulcers (‘bedsores’)

Read this if you, or someone you care for, is unable to move around without help from someone else or has to spend a long time in bed or in an armchair.

What are pressure ulcers?

A pressure ulcer is an area of skin or underlying fatty tissue that is damaged because the blood supply to the area is reduced. It is also known as a pressure sore or bedsore. It usually happens when you sit or lie in the same position for too long. People who have to lie in bed, might need advice on how to prevent a pressure ulcer occurring.

If care is not taken, pressure ulcers can be serious. They may be painful and can become infected, sometimes causing blood poisoning or bone infections. In severe cases the underlying muscle or bone may be destroyed. In extreme cases, pressure ulcers can become life threatening.

Am I at risk of getting a pressure ulcer?

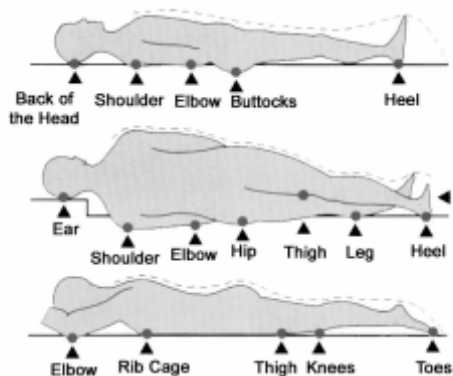
You may be at increased risk of developing pressure ulcers if you have:

- Problems with movement
- Problems with sensitivity to pain or discomfort - Some conditions and/or treatments, such as paralysis and diabetes, may reduce your sensitivity so that you are not aware of the need to move.
- Poor circulation
- Moist skin - You may be at increased risk if skin is not kept clean and dry as this weakens it.
- Pressure ulcers in the past - scar tissue from a previous pressure ulcer is weaker and more prone to further damage.

- Inadequate diet or fluid intake - poor diet may cause you to be malnourished. Lack of fluid intake may lead to dehydration. Losing too much weight can lead to loss of padding over bony points.

What does a pressure ulcer look like?

Pressure ulcers are more likely to appear on parts of the body which take your weight and where the bones are close to the surface.



The first sign is usually a change in skin colour that may appear slightly redder or darker than usual. (Red areas may not be visible on dark skin however; touch can be used to feel for pressure damage.) Damaged areas will feel warmer than the surrounding skin. If not treated quickly a blister or graze may appear which over time may result in a break in the skin.

The break in the skin may contain dead tissue, often yellow in colour, which needs to be removed by dressings so healing can take place. Some pressure ulcers can start as hard black patches in the skin.

What can I do to prevent a pressure ulcer?

- **Change your position as often as possible**

Please ask about correct seating positions, supporting your feet and posture. If you are unable to change position, ask for some help from the nurse or doctor.

- **Eat well**

Make sure you eat a healthy diet

- **Drink plenty of fluids**

Water is the best thing, but anything will keep your skin healthy

• Protect your skin

Wash your skin every day using warm water.

Soap can have a drying effect on the skin, so use sparingly.

Make sure you completely dry yourself, but avoid using talcum powder.

Use a suitable moisturiser to prevent dryness

- A special pressure relieving cushion or mattress may be suggested by your doctor or nurse.
- If you suffer from incontinence, ask your doctor or nurse for advice
- You **should not use** the following as pressure relieving aids as they can cause more problems: water filled gloves; synthetic sheepskins; genuine sheepskins and ring cushions.

Look for signs of damage

Check your skin at least once a day if you are able or ask your carer to do so. Look for skin that doesn't go back to its normal colour after you have taken your weight off it, swelling, blistering, shiny areas, dry patches or cracks. Also, feel for hard or warm areas. Do not continue to lie on skin that shows any sign of a pressure ulcer forming.

Ask a nurse to look if you think you are developing a pressure ulcer.

Be aware, sometimes pressure ulcers may occur even if you are doing everything you can to avoid them. Pressure ulcers can get better if you have the right treatment and you look after yourself.

Prevention is better than cure

Further information is available from www.nice.org.uk/CG029

“Working together to prevent Pressure Ulcers: a guide for patients and their carers”.

Reference:

‘Pressure ulcers – prevention and treatment (2005), National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence

NHS Direct is a 24 hour confidential telephone helpline providing nurse advice and health information.

NHS Direct can be contacted on 0845 4647.

This document is also available in other languages, large print and audio format upon request – 01223 216032 or patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

本文件也可應要求，製作成其他語文或特大字體版本，也可製作成錄音帶。

Cantonese

આ દસ્તાવેજ વિનંતી કરવાથી બીજી ભાષાઓ, મોટા છાપેલા અક્ષરો અથવા ઓડિઓ રચનામાં પણ મળી રહેશે.

Gujarati

A richiesta questo documento è anche disponibile in altre lingue, a caratteri grandi e in formato audio.

Italian

ئەم بەلگەییە ھەرۆھە بە زمانەکانی کە، بە چاپی درشت و بە شریتی تەسجیل دەس دەکەویت

Kurdish

درخواست پر یہ دستاویز دیگر زبانوں میں، بڑے حروف کی چھپائی اور سننے والے ذرائع پر بھی میسر ہے۔

Urdu

Document History

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