

Help Us Protect Your Skin

Informing you and your family about pressure ulcers and how you can assist your healthcare providers in preventing them.

What is a pressure ulcer?

A pressure ulcer, sometimes called a “bedsore,” is injury to the skin and underlying tissue usually caused by unrelieved pressure.

These ulcers usually occur on the buttocks, hips, heels, elbows and shoulders. These are body parts that have the most pressure when you are lying in bed or sitting for long periods of time. Pressure ulcers begin as reddened areas, but can damage skin and muscles if not treated.

What causes a pressure ulcer?

Pressure ulcers occur when unrelieved pressure on the skin squeezes the tiny blood vessels that supply the skin with nutrients and oxygen. When the skin does not get nutrients and oxygen for too long, the tissue may die and a pressure ulcer forms.

Sliding down in a bed or chair stretches or bends blood vessels that may also lead to a pressure ulcer. Even slight rubbing or friction on the skin may damage the skin or make a minor pressure ulcer worsen.

The following increase the risk for pressure ulcers:

- Cannot change positions
- Wetness from continuous or periodic loss of bowel
- Not eating or drinking enough
- Reduced mental awareness or confusion and/or bladder control

Pressure ulcers are serious problems and can lead to:

- Pain
- Slower recovery from health problems
- Possible complications (for ex. an infection, difficulty walking, etc.)

*When you
or your family member
were admitted to this
facility, nursing staff
looked at your skin.
This evaluation
showed that you are at
risk for developing
a pressure ulcer.*

Pressure ulcers may be preventable

By assisting your healthcare team you may be able to reduce the reasons you are at risk for getting a pressure ulcer.

If you or your loved one is receiving Hospice and/or Palliative care, it is important that you discuss the goals of care regarding pressure ulcer prevention and management with your healthcare provider. Comfort may be more important than turning and repositioning if you or your loved one is a Hospice and/or Palliative care patient.

Be sure that you:

- Ask questions and help plan your care
- Explain your needs, wants and concerns
- Know what is best for you
- Become an informed consumer of healthcare
- Understand what and why things are being done

Find out how you can help prevent pressure ulcers:

- In the nursing home; in the hospital; and at home

Key Steps to Pressure Ulcer Prevention

Protect your skin from injury:

LIMIT PRESSURE

- If you are unable to move yourself in bed, someone should change your position at least every two hours.
- If you are in a chair, your position should be changed at least every hour.
- If you are able to shift your own weight, you should do so every 15 minutes while sitting.

REDUCE FRICTION

- When shifting position or moving in your bed, don't pull or drag yourself across the sheets. Also, don't push or pull with your heels or elbows.
- Avoid repetitive movements such as rubbing your foot on the sheets to scratch an itchy spot.
- Avoid doughnut-shaped cushions - they can actually cause injury to deep tissues.

Take care of your skin:

- Allow a member of your healthcare team to inspect your skin at least once per day.
- If you notice any reddened, purple, painful or sore areas, notify your nurse as soon as possible.
- Clean your skin right away if you get urine or stool on it.
- Prevent dry skin by using creams or oils.
- Don't rub or massage skin over reddened, purple or sore parts of your body.

Safeguard your skin from moisture:

- Tell your healthcare provider if you have a problem leaking urine or stool.
- If leaking urine or stool is a problem, use absorbent pads while in bed and briefs while out of bed that pull moisture away from your body.
- Apply a cream or ointment to protect your skin from urine and/or stool.

If you are confined to bed for long periods of time:

- Talk to your healthcare provider about getting a special mattress or overlay.
- Try to keep the head of your bed as low as possible (unless other medical conditions do not permit it). If you need to raise the head of the bed for certain activities, try to raise it to the lowest point possible for as short a time as possible.
- Pillows or foam wedges may be used to keep your knees or ankles from touching each other.
- Avoid lying directly on your hip bone when lying on your side.
- Pillows may be placed under your legs from mid-calf to ankle to keep your heels off the bed. Never place pillows behind the knee.

If you are in a chair or wheelchair:

- Talk to your healthcare provider about getting a chair cushion to reduce pressure while sitting.
- Remember that comfort and good posture are important.

Improve your ability to move:

- Ask your nurse if you qualify for a rehabilitation program designed to help you maintain/regain independence and improve movement.

The information presented in this brochure is intended as a guideline based on evidence-based research and best practices. Thanks to the Texas Medical Foundation for sharing their materials.