

Pressure ulcer prevention

Information for patients
and carers



The purpose of this leaflet is to provide you and your carer with information on pressure ulcers, how they develop and the steps you can take to prevent them.

What is a pressure ulcer?

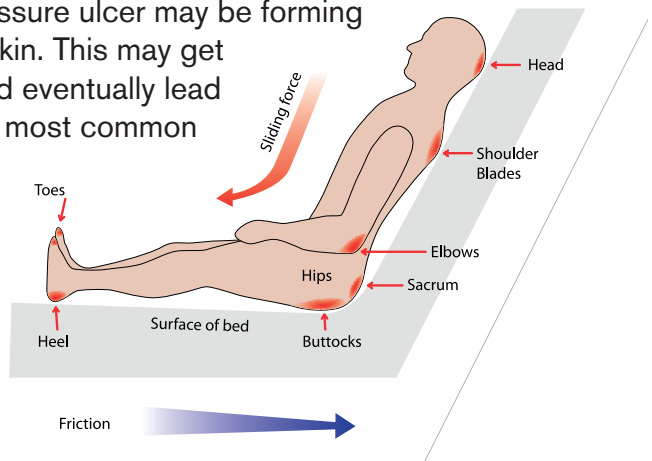
A pressure ulcer is damage that occurs on the skin and underlying tissues due to the lack of blood and oxygen supply. This may happen due to:

Pressure – the weight of the body pressing down on the skin, any object or device (for example catheter tubing) pressing on the skin.

Shearing – this can occur if the patient slides down in the bed or chair. The skin becomes stretched and tears.

Friction – rubbing the skin.

The first sign that a pressure ulcer may be forming is usually discoloured skin. This may get progressively worse and eventually lead to an open wound. The most common places for pressure ulcers to occur are over bony parts of the body like the bottom, heel, hip, elbow, ankle, shoulder, back and the back of the head.



Who gets pressure ulcers?

Anyone can get a pressure ulcer but some people are more likely to develop them than others.

For example, people who:




- have problems moving and cannot change position by themselves without help;
- cannot feel pain over part or all of their body;
- have problems with bowel or bladder control (incontinence);
- are seriously ill or undergoing surgery;
- currently have a pressure ulcer;
- have had pressure ulcers in the past;
- have a poor diet and don't drink enough water;
- have an injury that affects movement;
- have epidural analgesia, for example, women in labour;
- are ill or have suffered an injury, for example, a broken hip;
- have to wear a splint or body brace;
- have problems with memory and understanding, such as a dementia.



What are the warning signs?

- red patches on fair skin;
- purple/black patches on dark skin;
- swelling and blisters;
- hard or swollen areas which may be painful.

What are the possible complications of a pressure ulcer?

-  • pain and distress;
-  • infection;
-  • a longer stay in hospital.

If you would like more information on the complications of pressure ulcers, please watch this video www.pha.site/SSKIN scan QR code here:



Help us to help you to keep your skin healthy!

Important points to prevent or heal pressure ulcers:



Skin inspection

Know your own skin and tell your health care professional if any changes occur, including pain, small breaks or changes in skin colour that don't go away. It is important to pick up on skin changes as they happen.



Surfaces

Sometimes you may need a special mattress, cushion or other aids to help reduce pressure. If this difficult to use, inform your healthcare professional.

Medical devices: Pressure ulcers can also be caused by medical devices, like oxygen tubing, nasal cannulae, oxygen masks, catheter tubing, splints, compression hosiery, pressure relieving boots.

Remember to check the skin around and under that device regularly for pressure damage warning signs. Report any skin changes, discomfort or concerns to the health care professional.



Keep moving

Regular movement is essential and one of the most important aspects in pressure ulcer prevention. It allows blood flow to return to the skin to keep it healthy.

Avoid sitting for long periods of time (more than two hours).

Try simple movements like: rolling over from your back to your side (when in bed) or standing up (for two minutes), leaning forward or to the side (for 30 seconds every 30 minutes) (if safe to do so), going for a walk, or returning to bed.

These movements all help to offload pressure from bony areas.

If needed, your health care professional will discuss and agree a repositioning plan with you or your carer. This discussion may include:

- correct sitting and lying positions;
- how to adjust your sitting and lying position;
- how often you need to move or be moved in the bed or the chair;
- supporting your feet;
- keeping good posture;
- which equipment you should use and how to use it.



Increased moisture/incontinence.

It is important that your skin is kept clean and healthy. Continuously damp skin may be more easily damaged by pressure. If this is a problem, speak to your healthcare professional for advice.



Nutrition

Eat a good diet, plenty of fresh fruit, vegetables and protein-rich foods (eg meat, fish, eggs, cheese, and dairy products).

Staying hydrated: Drink adequate fluid to keep body and skin healthy.

Practical hints and tips



Do:

- change your position frequently, while in bed or sitting in a chair, avoid being in one position for long periods of time;
- take good care of your skin, keep it clean and free from too much moisture;
- try to eat a healthy balanced diet;
- use the equipment as advised by your healthcare professional;
- inspect your skin for changes in colour, such as red marks or purple/black discolouration.



Don't:

- sit on rubber ring cushions (may cause more damage);
- massage or rub pressure areas;
- drag yourself over damp or creased bed clothes;
- use a sheepskin to help relieve pressure – this is merely a comfort measure;
- allow incontinence sheets to crease up under you – avoid their use if you can;
- don't try to manage a pressure ulcer yourself – seek help from your healthcare professional or tissue viability nurse specialist.

Working together to keep your skin healthy

If you find it difficult, or do not wish to follow the advice given, your healthcare professional will explore other options with you to help inform your decision.



For help recognising pressure ulcers visit
www.pha.site/recognising-pressure-ulcers



To find more information on pressure ulcers visit:

European Pressure Ulcers Advisory Panel: <https://epuap.org>

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence:
www.nice.org.uk/search?q=Pressure%20ulcers

Spinal Injuries Association: https://spinal.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/SIA_Pressure_Care_Factsheet_v2.pdf

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