

A guide for
patients and
carers



Cambridge
University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

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Preventing pressure ulcers



To find out more, visit:
www.cuh.nhs.uk/

What is a pressure ulcer?

A pressure ulcer is an area of damage to the skin and underlying tissue.

They are sometimes known as pressure sores or bed sores.

What causes a pressure ulcer?

Pressure ulcers are caused by poor circulation to tissues due to a combination of the following factors.

Pressure

Body weight and some equipment (eg. anti-thrombosis stockings) can squash the skin and other tissues which are already under pressure. This reduces the blood supply to the area and can lead to tissue damage.

Shearing

Sliding or slumping down the bed/chair can damage the skin and deeper layers of tissue.

Friction

Poor moving and handling can remove the top layers of skin. Repeated friction can increase your risk.

Who is most at risk of developing pressure ulcers?

You may be at risk of developing pressure ulcers for a number of reasons including the following:

Problems with movement

If your ability to move is limited you don't get enough oxygenated blood to the parts under pressure.

Poor circulation

Vascular disease or smoking reduces your circulation.

Moist skin

You may be at increased risk if your skin is too damp, due to incontinence, sweat or a weeping wound. It is important that your skin is kept clean and healthy.

Lack of sensitivity to pain or discomfort

Conditions such as diabetes, stroke, nerve/muscle disorders etc reduce the normal sensations that usually prompt you, or enable you to move. Some treatments (eg. epidural pain relief, medication, operations) reduce your sensitivity to pain or discomfort so that you are not aware of the need to move.

Previous tissue damage

Scarred tissue will have lost some of its previous strength and is more prone to breakdown.

Inadequate diet or fluid intake

Lack of fluid may dehydrate your tissues. Weight gain or loss can affect the pressure distribution over bony points and affect healing.

Risk assessment

To assess your risk of developing pressure ulcers, a member of your health care team will examine/ assess you and ask you some questions. This will help to identify if you require a specialised equipment or other forms of care, and will assist in providing for your individual needs.

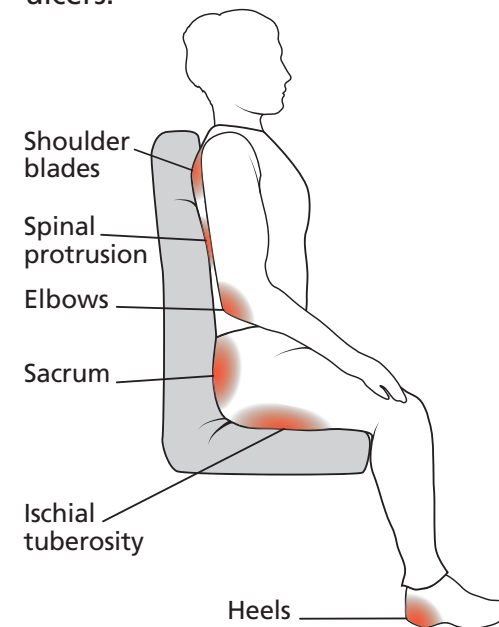
What are the early signs of a pressure ulcer?

You may notice the following signs:

- change in skin colour, redder or darker
- heat or cold
- discomfort or pain
- blistering
- skin damage.

Without appropriate intervention the damage may worsen, developing into hard black tissue or an open wound.

Common locations of pressure ulcers:



What can I do to avoid pressure ulcers?

There are several ways you can reduce the risk of pressure ulcers.

Keep moving

Changing your position regularly helps keep blood flowing. If you have reduced movement the health care team looking after you will assist you with regular turns in addition to providing specialist mattresses, cushions etc.

Look for signs of damage

Check your skin for pressure damage at least once a day.

A mirror can be used for hard to see areas. Look for skin that doesn't go back to its normal colour after you have taken your weight off it. Do not continue to lie on skin that is redder or darker than usual. Also watch out for blisters, dry patches or breaks in the skin.

Protect your skin

Wash your skin using warm water or pH neutral skin cleansers. Do not use heavily perfumed soap or talcum powder, as these can soak up the skin's natural oils leading to vulnerable dry areas. If you suffer from incontinence please inform your health care team as they can assess the best way to deal with the problems. Rubbing or massaging skin is not recommended as this can cause more damage.

Eat a well-balanced diet

Make sure you eat a healthy balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids.

What should I do if I suspect a pressure ulcer?

Tell your doctor or nurse as soon as possible and follow the advice they give you.

Further information can be found on:

www.nhsstopthepressure.com

www.nice.org.uk

or from:

Tissue Viability Team, Box 243
Cambridge University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust
Telephone: **01223 216033**

This leaflet contains general information. If there's anything else you need to know, please speak to your nurse or doctor.



Text adapted with kind permission from the Patient Safety Federation