

Tissue Viability Team

How to prevent pressure ulcers ('bedsores')

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, you may find the following information useful.

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.

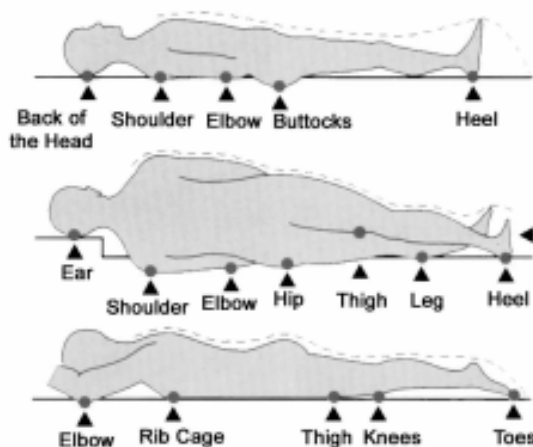
Am I at risk of getting a pressure ulcer?

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 or black in colour, which needs to be removed so healing can take place. Dressings are sometimes used to help remove this dead tissue and promote healing.

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 to drink, but any drink 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
 - 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.



We are currently working towards a smoke free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Polish

Jeżeli chciałbyś uzyskać te informacje w innym języku, w dużej czcionce lub w formacie audio, poproś pracownika oddziału o kontakt z biurem Informacji Pacjenta (Patient Information) pod numerem telefonu: 01223 216032 lub pod adresem patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Portuguese

Se precisar desta informação noutra língua, em impressão de letras grandes ou formato áudio, por favor peça ao departamento que contacte a secção de Informação aos Doentes (Patient Information) pelo telefone 01223 216032 ou através do e-mail patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Arabic

إذا كنت تود الحصول على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، بالأحرف الكبيرة أو بشكل شريط صوتي، يمكنك أن تطلب من القسم الاتصال بمعلومات المريض على الرقم: 01223216032 أو عبر البريد الإلكتروني: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Cantonese

如您需以另一語言版本、特大字體或錄音形式索取本資料，請要求部門聯絡病人諮詢服務：電話 01223 216032，電郵地址 patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Turkish

Eğer bu bilgileri başka bir dilde veya büyük baskılı veya sesli olarak isterseniz, lütfen bulunduğunuz bölümdeki görevlilere söyleyin Hasta Bilgilendirme servisini arasinlar: 01223 216032 veya patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Urdu

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی دیگر زبان میں، بڑے الفاظ میں یا آڈیو طریقہ سے درکار ہوں تو برائے مہربانی اس شعبہ سے پیشمنت انفارمیشن سے ذیل کے ذریعہ رابطہ کرنے کی درخواست کریں: 01223 216032 یا patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Bengali

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Document history

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