

Avoiding Pressure Ulcers



Information for patients and service users

What are pressure ulcers?

Pressure ulcers are areas of damage to the skin and/or underlying tissue. They are also known as pressure sores or bed sores but this can be misleading as they do not always occur whilst in bed.

Causes

Pressure ulcers can be caused by:

- Unrelieved pressure

The weight of the body pressing down on the skin can damage the blood supply to the area leading to tissue damage.

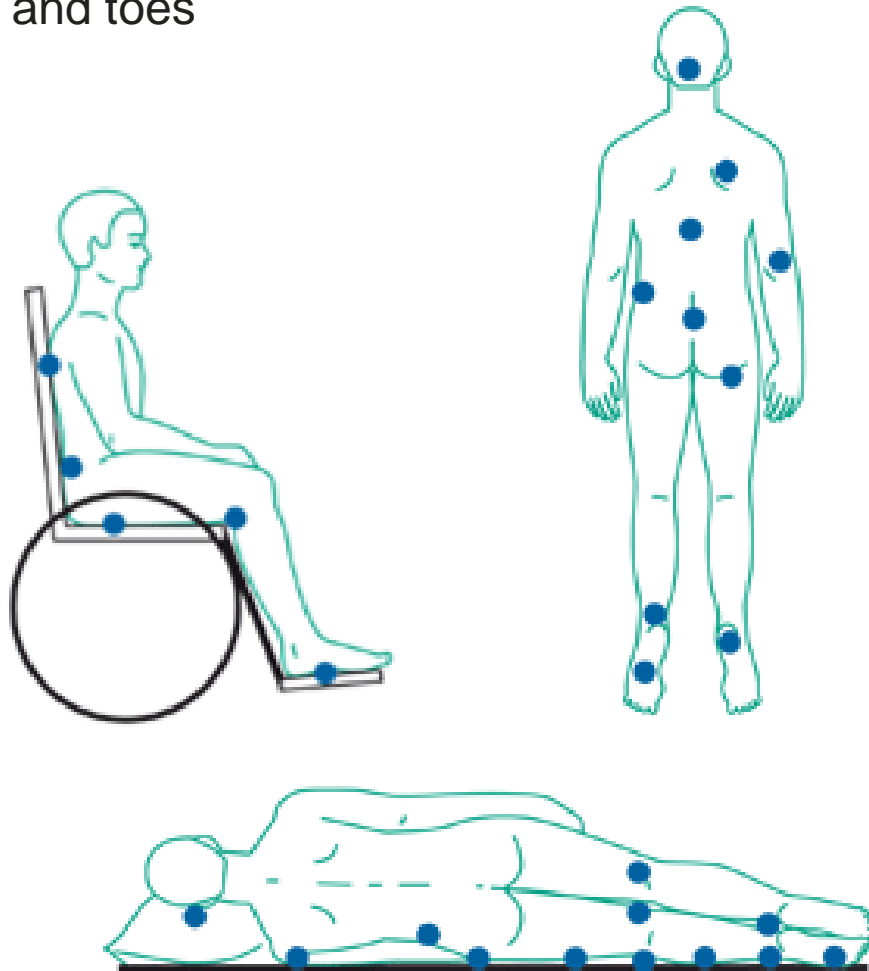
- Pressure in combination with shear

When layers of skin are forced to slide over one another. This can happen when you slide down, or are pulled up, in a bed or chair.

Common sites for pressure ulcers

The most common sites are over the areas where bones are close to the skin:

- Back of head and ears
- Shoulders, elbows and rib cage
- Sacrum and base of the spine
- Hips, knees and ankles
- Heels and toes



Diagrams from convatec.com

Am I at risk of getting pressure ulcers?

You are most at risk if:

- you have trouble moving and cannot change position yourself
- you cannot feel pain over part or all of your body
- you have problems with incontinence
- you have a serious illness, or have had surgery
- you have problems eating a balanced diet and don't drink enough water
- you have a damaged spinal cord and can neither move nor feel your bottom and legs
- you have suffered an injury like a fractured femur or broken hip

Assessing your risk

On admission, your risk will be assessed by a trained nurse. You should be assessed within two hours of your admission to hospital. The exact timing will depend on your individual condition and circumstances. The result of your risk assessment will be put in your records.

If you feel you are at high risk, please inform the health care staff looking after you, as soon as possible.

What you can do to help

If you are willing and able to do so, staff can teach you how to inspect your own skin. You should inspect your skin regularly, looking for signs of possible or actual damage.

Training can also be given to your carer if you have one.

The signs to look for are:

- 'purple' or 'blue' patches on dark skinned people
- red patches on light skinned people
- swelling
- blisters
- shiny areas
- dry patches
- skin that is cracked calloused or wrinkled.

The signs to feel for are:

- hard areas
- warm areas
- swollen skin over bony joints

If you notice any signs of damage, please inform your nurse immediately.

Relieving pressure

You (and your carer if you have one) will be given advice on how to relieve pressure on susceptible areas.

The advice should include:

- the correct lying and seating positions
- how to adjust your position
- how often you need to be moved
- which equipment you need
- how to avoid pressure and shear

Diet

Diet and hydration are very important. These will help reduce the risk of getting pressure ulcers and improve healing of any existing ones.

It is important to eat a protein enriched diet. Your diet needs to provide you with enough energy, protein, vitamins and minerals. During your stay in hospital you may be referred to the dietician if you are not eating and drinking well or have recently lost weight.

Useful websites

www.your-turn.org.uk

www.stopthepressure.com

Help us prevent the spread of infection in hospital.

Please make sure your hands are clean. Wash and dry them thoroughly and/or use the gel provided.

If you have been unwell in the last 48 hours please consider whether your visit is essential.

If you need this leaflet in a language other than English, or would like to receive this information in large print, Braille or audio, please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01934 647216.



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