

Preventing pressure ulcers

Information and advice for patients and carers

Tissue Viability

What are pressure ulcers?

Pressure ulcers, also known as pressure sores (previously bed sores), are areas of damage to the skin and underlying tissue.

What causes pressure ulcers?

Pressure ulcers are usually caused by sitting or lying in one position for too long without moving. This can also be aggravated by rubbing or dragging the skin across a surface. A pressure ulcer can develop in a very short period of time, as short as a few hours.

People who are at risk of developing a pressure ulcer are those who:

- have poor mobility or are unable to move around very well
- are bed, chair or wheelchair bound
- have poor circulation
- are incontinent (as this can cause areas of skin to become moist)
- have had a pressure ulcer before
- are malnourished or dehydrated
- have lost feeling or sensation in parts of their body
- have a pre-existing medical condition
- are elderly (as skin becomes thinner and less elastic)

What are the symptoms of a pressure ulcer?

A pressure ulcer usually starts with the skin changing colour and if untreated can progress into a blister or deep wound. Early symptoms that indicate a pressure ulcer is developing are:

- areas of redness (on light skin) or purple/blue patches (on dark skin)
- swelling over bony areas
- blistered areas of skin
- dry, hard or shiny patches of skin
- calluses, cracked or broken areas of skin
- an area of skin that is warm to touch
- discomfort or painful areas of skin

If you or someone you are caring for has any of these symptoms please tell your/their nurse as soon as possible.

Preventing pressure ulcers

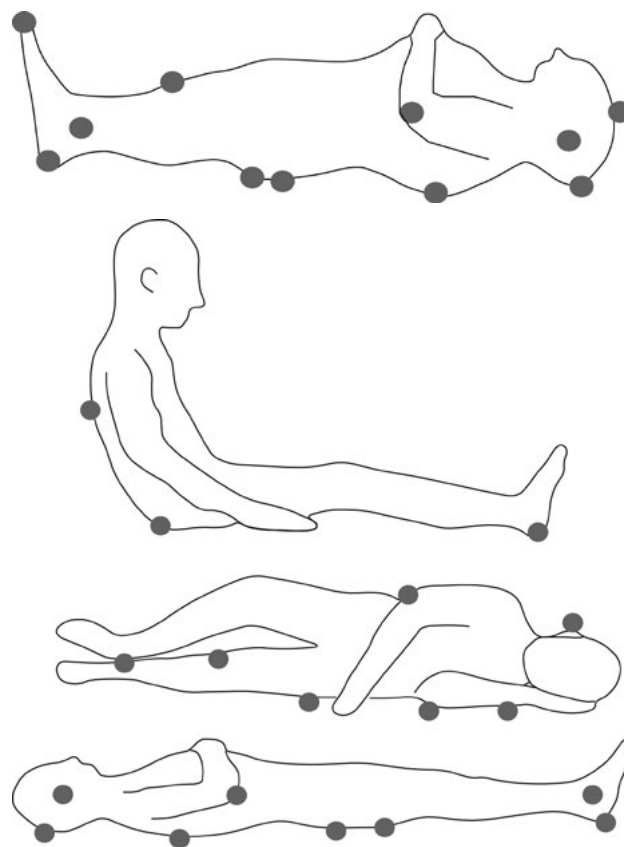
Information and advice for patients and carers

Tissue Viability

Where are pressure ulcers most likely to develop?

Pressure ulcers can develop on any part of the body where the skin is compressed but are most common over bony prominences such as the bottom, heels, hip and elbows.

The diagrams on the next page show areas where pressure ulcers are most likely to develop:



How can pressure ulcers be prevented?

To reduce the risk of developing a pressure ulcer:

Check your skin daily: Skin should be checked daily for early symptoms of pressure ulcers, particularly areas where there is constant pressure. Identifying the early symptoms is important so that steps to prevent a pressure ulcer developing can be taken.

Eat and drink well: Eating a well-balanced diet and drinking plenty of fluids, particularly water, will help to reduce the risk of a pressure ulcer developing.

Keep skin clean and dry: If you are incontinent speak to your nurse or doctor about how to manage this and protect your skin. To prevent your skin becoming too dry you may need to moisturise it.

Preventing pressure ulcers

Information and advice for patients and carers

Tissue Viability

Avoid pressure from the following: Wrinkled bed sheets, clothing with thick seams, tight shoes and socks which can cause an increase in pressure on vulnerable areas.

Keep moving: Changing position as often as possible will help to relieve the pressure. This should be done at least every two hours.

- If you are in bed change your position between lying on your back and alternate sides.
- If you are in an armchair or wheelchair try to change your position by standing if you are able, or by rocking from cheek to cheek.

You/the person you are caring for may also be given pressure-relieving equipment to use when in bed or in a chair. This will be arranged by your/their nurse.

Further information

If you have any questions or concerns about pressure ulcers please speak to a doctor or nurse. Alternatively you can contact the tissue viability nurses on 0121 507 3278.

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our website:

Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust

www.swbh.nhs.uk

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. (2014). Pressure ulcer: prevention and management [CG179]. [Online] Available at: www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg179 (Accessed 21 October 2022).

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact SWB Library Services on ext 3587 or email swbh.library@nhs.net.



A Teaching Trust of The University of Birmingham
Incorporating City, Sandwell and Rowley Regis Hospitals
© Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust

ML6287

Issue Date: October 2022
Review Date: October 2025