

# Preventing pressure ulcers

Information and advice for parents and carers

## *Paediatrics*

### **What are pressure ulcers?**

Pressure ulcers, also known as pressure sores (previously bed sores), are areas of damage to the skin and underlying tissue. They can cause pain and can lead to infection or further illness.

### **What causes pressure ulcer?**

Pressure ulcers are caused by pressure, friction and moisture. Your child's pressure ulcer may be caused by sitting or lying in one position for too long without moving. It can also be made worse if the skin is repeatedly rubbed or pulled across a surface or if the skin is moist. A pressure ulcer can develop in a very short period of time, in as little as a few hours.

Other factors include if your child:

- is unable to move around very well. For example if he/she is bed, chair or wheelchair bound or if they are very overweight and find it difficult to move
- is underweight as they will have more bony areas which are vulnerable to pressure ulcers
- has poor circulation
- is incontinent (as this can cause areas of the skin to become moist)
- becomes malnourished or dehydrated
- has a pre-existing medical condition
- has had surgery in the past month
- is in pain

### **Where are pressure ulcers most likely to develop?**

Pressure ulcers can develop anywhere on the body but mostly over bony areas. In children, pressure ulcers are more likely to develop in the occipital area (back of their heads), sacrum (bottom of the spine), buttocks, heels, ears and elbows.

### **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
- bumpy, cracked or broken areas of skin
- an area of skin that is warm to touch
- discomfort or painful areas of skin

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If your child has any of these symptoms please tell their nurse as soon as possible. There are 4 grades of pressure ulcers with grade 1 being a red/purple rash, to grade 4 which is when the bone or muscle is exposed from tissue loss. Some pressure ulcers can also be unclassified. Please speak to your child's nurse or doctor if you have any questions.

### **How can pressure ulcers be prevented?**

To reduce the risk of your child developing a pressure ulcer you should:

#### **Check their skin daily**

for early symptoms of pressure ulcers, particularly around their heads, sacrum and heels. Spotting symptoms early is important so that steps can be taken to prevent a pressure ulcer developing.

#### **Make sure they eat and drink well**

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

#### **Keep their skin clean and dry**

If your child is incontinent, speak to his/her nurse or doctor about how to manage this and protect their skin. If your child uses nappies then change these more often to prevent moisture.

#### **Avoid pressure**

From things such as dressings on broken skin, tubing attached with tape, wrinkled bed sheets, tight clothing with thick seams.

#### **Keep them moving**

Changing position as often as possible will help to relieve the pressure. You should encourage your child do this every 2 hours. If your child is in bed, change their position by laying them on their back and alternate sides paying special attention to their heads and heels and use a slide sheet for children over 8 years old.

#### **Get them a special mattress**

Speak to you child's nurse or doctor about pressure relieving equipment such as a mattress which is specifically for children. They will also advise of specific benefits and risks of such equipment.

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### Contact details

If you have any questions or queries, please contact the ward your child was discharged from:

Lyndon One - 0121 507 3800/3319

Lyndon Ground - 0121 507 3717/3266

D19/PAU - 0121 507 4019/4409

### Further information

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### Sources of information used in this leaflet

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- NHS Quality Improvement Scotland, 'Prevention and management of pressure ulcers', 2009
- Parnham A, 'Pressure ulcer risk assessment and prevention in children', 2012
- Willock J, 'Pressure sores in children - the acute hospital perspective', 2000
- European Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel, 'Pressure ulcer prevention', 2010

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5495 or email: [swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net)



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