

How to avoid pressure ulcers

A patient's guide



Information for patients

Tissue Viability Service



**REACT
FRED**



Why have I been given this leaflet?

You have been given this leaflet because you have been identified as being at risk of developing a pressure ulcer.

This leaflet will help you understand more about pressure ulcers; what they are, how they develop and how they can be prevented.

What are pressure ulcers?

A pressure ulcer is an area of damage to the skin, and the tissues beneath it. Pressure ulcers are also known as 'bed sores' or 'pressure sores'.

Pressure ulcers can be painful, and may progress to become deep wounds. They can become infected, leading to blood poisoning or bone infection. In extreme cases, they can be life threatening.

Pressure ulcers can also lead to a longer hospital stay or admission into hospital from home.



How do pressure ulcers develop?

Pressure ulcers can develop very quickly or over a longer period of time.

They can be caused by a combination of the following:

- Pressure - for example, the weight of the body pressing against a hard surface, such as a bed or chair, damaging the blood supply to that area
- Shear - this may occur if you slide down or are dragged up the bed or chair, causing damage to the deeper layers of the skin
- Friction - repeated friction can increase the risk of pressure ulcers. Repeated rubbing of the heels on the bed linen is a commonly seen friction injury
- Moisture - a lot of moisture on the skin can increase the effects of pressure, shear and friction, as the skin becomes more soft and fragile

Am I at risk of developing a pressure ulcer?

Anyone can develop a pressure ulcer. However, you are more at risk if you:

- Have difficulty moving yourself
- Have had a pressure ulcer before
- Have loss of feeling or sensation to any part of your body
- Have continence problems
- Are seriously ill or have had surgery
- Are not eating or drinking as much as you used to
- Have poor circulation
- Are very old or very young
- Are very underweight or overweight

Which parts of my body are at risk of developing a pressure ulcer?

Pressure ulcers can occur anywhere on the body. However, they are more common over bony prominences (places where your bones are close to your skin), for example:

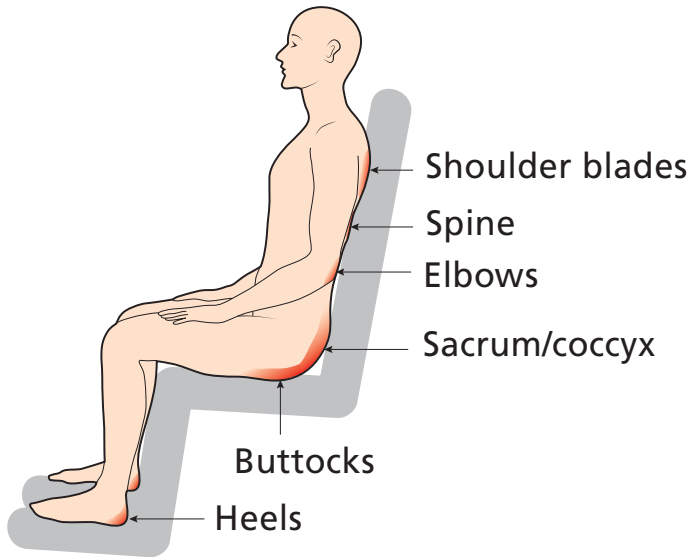
- Buttocks
- Elbows
- Ears
- Sacrum (the lower part of your backbone)
- Trochanters (hips)
- Spine / shoulders
- Heels
- Occipital area (back of head)
- Toes

They may also develop under medical devices used to treat your condition, for example oxygen masks or tubing, plaster casts, orthopaedic splints or anti-embolic stockings.

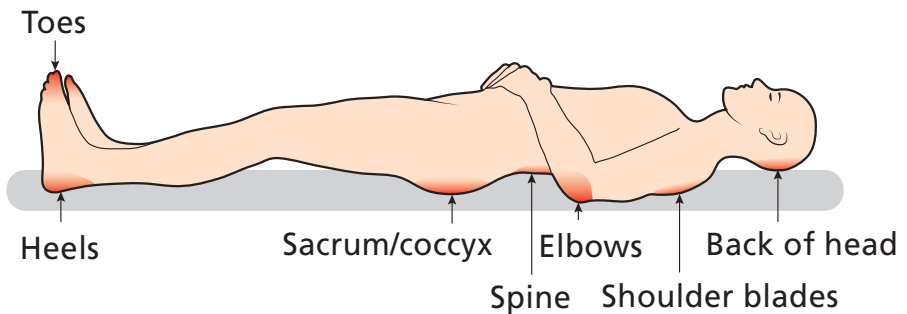
It is important that you inform your healthcare team if you have a poorly fitting or painful medical device.

The following diagrams show the areas of the body most at risk, dependant on positioning:

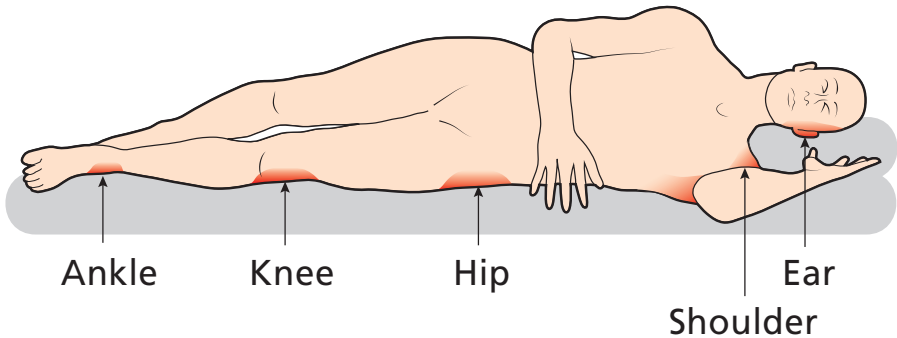
Sitting position



Lying position



Lateral position



What can my healthcare team do to reduce my risk of developing a pressure ulcer?

- **Assess risk** - your healthcare team will assess your risk of developing a pressure ulcer and will agree a preventative plan of care with you
- **Skin assessment** - your healthcare team will ask if they can check your skin on a regular basis
- **Surface** - you may be provided with special equipment to help redistribute pressure, such as a mattress, cushion or boots to prevent pressure on the heels
- **Keep moving** - if required, your healthcare team will help you to change position on a regular basis, day and night
- **Incontinence / moisture** - your healthcare team will help you to keep your skin clean, dry and moisturised
- **Nutrition** - if you are not eating or drinking as much as you used to, you may be referred to a dietitian for nutritional support
- **Giving information** - you and your relatives / carers will be provided with information on how to reduce your risk of developing a pressure ulcer

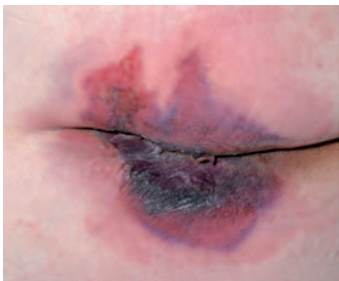
How can I reduce my risk of developing a pressure ulcer?

Skin assessment:

If you are able, check your skin at least daily, particularly over bony prominences. You are looking for the following signs and symptoms:

- Red patches that do not turn white when lightly pressed (lighter skin tones)
- Purple / blue patches (darker skin tones)
- Broken skin
- Blisters
- Swelling
- Pain / discomfort

If you have any of these signs or any other changes to your skin, please let your healthcare team know.



Surface:

If you have a special mattress or cushion, please let your healthcare team know if it is uncomfortable or not working.

Keep moving:

If you are able to, and it is safe to do so, change your position frequently.

Do not dig your heels into the mattress when pushing up the bed. Bend your knees and place your feet flat on the surface of the mattress. This will avoid extra pressure on your heels.

Make sure your bedding is not creased and is not pulled too tightly across you.

Check that your shoes, slippers, socks and stockings are not too tight, so that they do not restrict your circulation.

Incontinence:

If you have any continence problems, please speak to your healthcare team for advice on how to manage these conditions.

Nutrition:

Eat a well balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids (if allowed). Please speak to your healthcare team if you have any concerns.

Giving information:

Your healthcare team will let you know if you are at risk of developing pressure ulcers, and will offer advice to you on how to prevent them. Please speak to them if you have any further questions or concerns.

What will happen if I develop a pressure ulcer?

The hospital is committed to reducing the number of pressure ulcers that develop whilst people are in our care. However, unfortunately, due to the severity and nature of illness, pressure ulcers may still occur in a small number of people.

If you develop a pressure ulcer, appropriate care will be provided.

- Your healthcare team may need to assess your skin more frequently
- You will be asked if a photograph of the pressure ulcer can be taken. This will form part of your medical records
- If you have been in hospital, you may require visits from the community healthcare team when you go home
- Your healthcare team may need to apply a dressing to the pressure ulcer
- You may require different types of equipment, such as a more specialist type of mattress, to help reduce the risk of developing further pressure ulcers.

Who can I speak to if I have any questions or concerns about pressure ulcers?

If you have any further questions about pressure ulcers, please do not hesitate to speak to the healthcare team looking after you.

On discharge from hospital or community services, if you, your carer or relative have any concerns with regards to the following:

- **S**urface / equipment
- **S**kin
- **K**eeP moving (mobility)
- **I**ncontinence / moisture
- **N**utrition

Please do not hesitate to ring Single Point of Access (SPA) on:

0114 _____



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