

Preventing Pressure Injuries (Bedsore)

Pressure Injury (Bedsore)

A pressure injury (or bedsore) is a skin injury caused by sitting or lying in the same position too long or by sliding down in a bed or chair.

Pressure on the skin squeezes small blood vessels so blood rich with oxygen and nutrients can't reach the skin. As the tissue under the skin breaks down, a sore forms on the skin.

Where Pressure Injuries Form

Sores usually form over the bony parts of the body that press against a mattress, chair, or other body part. These areas include the ankle, heel, knee, tailbone, hip, elbow, shoulder or back of the head. (See drawing at right.)

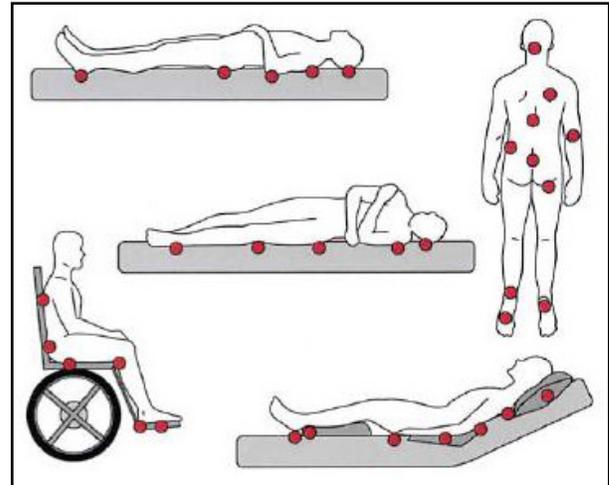
Risks of Pressure Injuries

You are at risk for pressure injuries if you:

- stay in a bed or chair
- cannot move or change positions by yourself
- have bladder or bowel control problems (sweat, urine or stool on the skin can cause irritation)
- do not eat well (good nutrition helps keep skin healthy)
- are not fully alert
- are not able to feel discomfort or pain.

Signs of Pressure Injuries

As the tissue under the skin breaks down, your skin may change color. Unless the pressure is relieved, the injury will continue to develop. Damage to skin and tissue can be mild (reddened skin) to severe (affecting muscle and bone).



Illustrations used with permission from Information & Quality Healthcare (IQH)

The dots show where you can get pressure injury when sitting or lying in the same position too long or by sliding down in a bed or chair. The most common area for pressure injury is on your tailbone.

How to Prevent Pressure Injuries

Pressure injuries can be prevented. If you cannot do the following alone, members of your health care team or family can help.

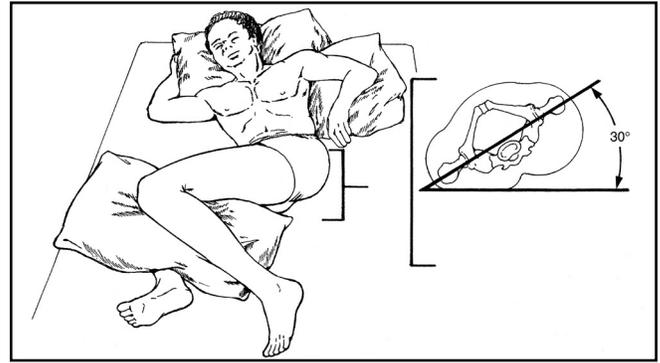
- **Take care of your skin.**
 - Look at your skin every day.
 - Change wet bedding or clothing to keep your skin clean and dry.
 - Apply barrier cream or ointment to protect your skin from urine and stool.
 - Use a moisturizer to prevent dry skin. Avoid using it on areas that stay moist or wet from body fluids. (If you have diabetes, do not put lotion between your toes.)

■ Protect your skin from injury.

- Do not rub or massage skin over bony parts of the body.
- Change positions often.
 - If you are in bed, change position at least every 2 hours. If you have a special bed or mattress, change position every 2 to 4 hours.
 - If you are in a chair, change position every hour. If you can, shift your weight every 15 minutes while sitting. Keep a good posture. Use a special chair cushion (Avoid doughnut-shaped cushions.)
 - Do not rub, pull or drag your body against the sheets in bed while you are changing positions.
- If you wear stockings to prevent blood clots, oxygen tubing, masks or other devices, remove them at least twice a day to look at your skin for any redness or open sores. Put the stockings back on as directed by your health care team.

■ Protect your skin if you cannot get out of bed.

- Keep your bed as flat as you can. If the head of the bed is raised more than 30 degrees, you may slide.
- Use pillows to keep your knees and ankles from touching each other.
- Do not lie right on your hip bone when lying on your side.
- Keep your heels off the bed. Put pillows under your legs from midcalf to ankle. (Never put pillows behind your knees.)
- Reposition yourself or be moved at least every 2 hours. If you have a special bed or mattress, reposition or be moved every 2 to 4 hours.



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When turning to your side, put a pillow between your legs so your pelvis is at a 30-degree angle.

■ Eat healthful foods.

- Eat a balanced diet that includes protein, fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products.
- If you are on a special diet, talk with your doctor about taking vitamins or supplements.

What To Tell Your Health Care Team

Tell your doctor, nurse or other member of your health care team if you:

- have or think you have a pressure injury
- have pain or discomfort in any of your bony body parts, or under any medical devices
- need special creams to protect skin from body fluids
- need a special cushion for sitting.

Remember, you are an important member of your health care team. Ask questions and tell your doctor or nurse about your needs and concerns.

Information adapted from the U.S Department of Health and Human Services.