

Preventing Pressure Ulcers (Bedsore)

Pressure Ulcer (Bedsore)

A pressure ulcer (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.

Pressure ulcers can cause pain, longer hospital stays, and slower healing. If you stay in a bed, chair or wheelchair, you can get pressure ulcers.

Where Pressure Ulcers 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.

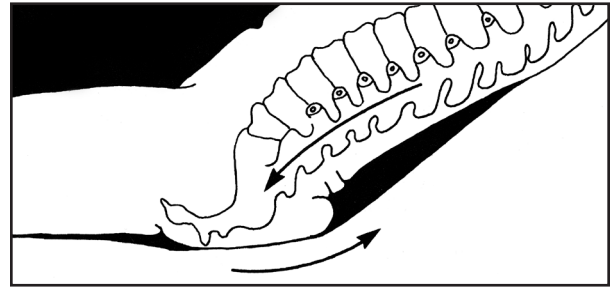
Risks of Pressure Ulcers

You are at risk for pressure ulcers 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 Ulcers

As the tissue under the skin breaks down, your skin may change color. Unless the pressure is relieved, the sore will continue



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When the head of the bed is raised more than 30 degrees, you may slide down causing injury to the blood vessels.

to develop. Damage to skin and tissue can be mild (reddened skin) to severe (affecting muscle and bone).

How to Prevent Pressure Ulcers

Pressure ulcers 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. If you have a medical device, look at the skin around it.
 - Keep your skin clean and dry. Use a soft cloth or sponge. Use pads or briefs to absorb urine. Change them often.
 - Take a bath or shower when needed. Use warm water and a mild soap. Avoid a bath or shower every day unless your skin needs to be cleaned.
 - Apply barrier cream or ointment to protect your skin from urine and stool.
 - Use a lotion or moisturizer to prevent dry skin. Avoid using lotion on areas that stay moist or wet from body fluids.

(over)

(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.
- 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.

■ Reduce friction.

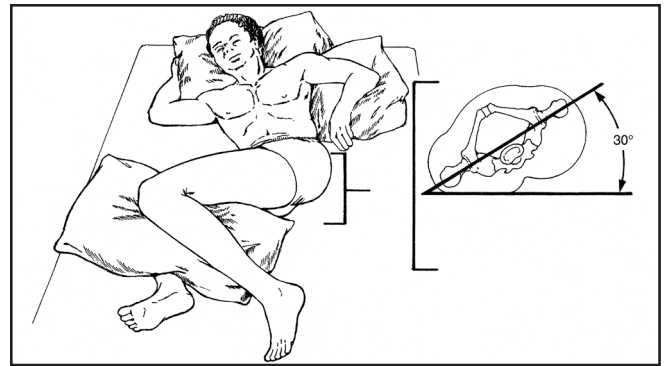
- Don't rub, pull or drag your body against the sheets in bed while you are changing positions.
- Avoid using doughnut-shaped (ring) cushions while sitting.

■ 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.
- Don't 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.

■ Protect your skin if you are in a chair or wheelchair.

- Use a special chair cushion. (Avoid using doughnut-shaped cushions.)



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When turning to your side, avoid lying directly on your hip bone. Place a pillow between your legs so your pelvis is at a 30-degree angle.

- Reposition yourself or be moved every 15 minutes.
- Keep a good posture.

■ 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 ulcer
- 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, tell your doctor or nurse about your needs and concerns.

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