

# Pressure Ulcers & Skin Care

## Prevention and Treatment



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**This leaflet is designed to provide you with information regarding skin care pressure ulcers.**

**Prevention and early detection of skin changes are vital to reduce or avoid the development of pressure ulcers.**



## What is a pressure ulcer? (also known as a pressure sore/bed sore)

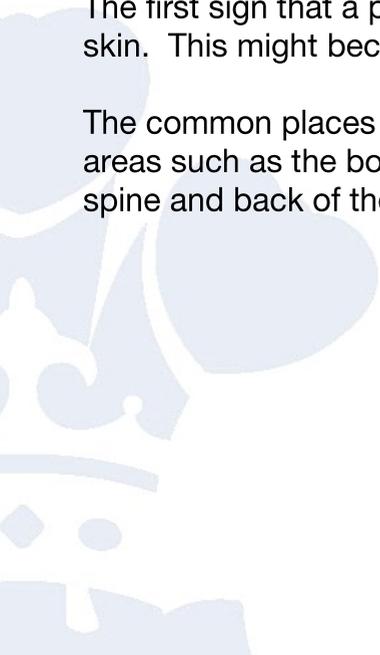
A pressure ulcer is damage to the skin and underlying tissue.

Pressure ulcers are caused by three main things:

- **Pressure**—the weight of the body pressing down on the skin
- **Shear**—the layers of skin slide over one another. This might happen when you slide down or are pulled up in a bed or a chair or transferring to and from a wheelchair
- **Friction**—rubbing of the skin

The first sign that a pressure ulcer might be forming is discoloured skin. This might become worse and result in an open wound.

The common places for pressure ulcers to occur are over bony areas such as the bottom, heels, hips, elbows, ankles, shoulders, spine and back of the head. Bridge of nose or ears.



## Who gets pressure ulcers?

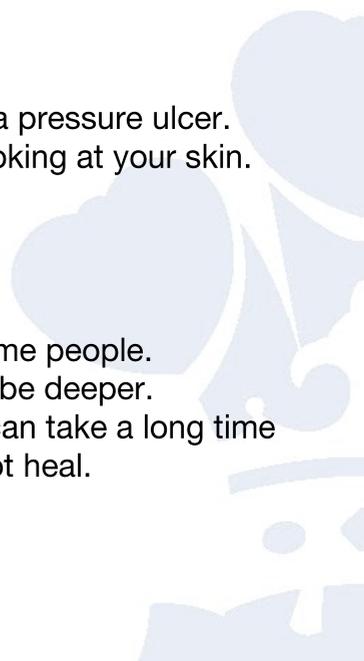
Anyone can develop a pressure ulcer but some people are more at risk than others. People might be at increased risk of getting a pressure ulcer if, for example they:

- have problems moving and cannot change position without help
- cannot feel pain over part or all of their body
- are incontinent
- are seriously ill
- have had pressure ulcers in the past
- have a poor diet and fluid intake
- are very old
- have damage to the spinal cord and cannot move or feel their bottom or legs
- older people who may have suffered an injury such as a broken hip
- are at the end of life as skin changes can occur quite suddenly

Your nurse will assess your risk of developing a pressure ulcer. This will involve asking some questions and looking at your skin. This will be done on a frequent basis.

## Preventing pressure ulcers

Pressure ulcers can develop very quickly in some people. Damage may not just involve the skin but may be deeper. Pressure ulcers can cause pain. Deep ulcers can take a long time to heal. In some cases pressure ulcers may not heal.



In order to reduce the risk of pressure ulcers it is important to do the following:

## **Keep moving**

Moving around and changing position as much as possible reduces and relieves the pressure to vulnerable areas. If you have a pressure ulcer it is best to avoid lying or sitting on the ulcer as this will make it worse.

Your nurse is able to advise on how best to relieve or reduce pressure. This advice should include:

- correct lying and sitting positions
- how to adjust your lying and sitting position
- how often you need to move or be assisted to move
- supporting your feet
- keeping good posture
- which equipment to use and how to use it

If you have a pressure ulcer you should be changing position regularly to allow the ulcer to heal and prevent more damage. This applies to you whether you are in bed, chair or wheelchair.

Your nurse should work with you to choose how is best for you to be positioned. They will advise you about the best amount of time to be in a sitting position.

## **Mattresses and cushions**

There are different types of mattresses and cushions that can help reduce pressure over the bony parts of your body and so prevent pressure ulcers.

Mattresses provide greater pressure relief as your pressure is more evenly spread throughout the mattress surface. It is therefore advisable that you sleep in your bed rather than in a chair.

Your nurse will work with you to advise on which equipment is most appropriate for your needs and review this on a regular basis.

## **Skin assessment**

Your skin should be checked regularly for signs of pressure ulcer development. How often your skin is checked depends upon your level of risk. Your nurse will be looking for:

- red patches of skin on light skinned people that do not go away
- bluish/purplish patches on dark skinned people that do not go away
- blisters or damage to the skin
- patches of hot skin
- swelling
- patches of hard skin
- patches of cool skin

If you have a pressure ulcer it should be assessed at regular intervals. The ulcer will be recorded in your notes which might include taking tracings or photographs. Your nurse will grade your pressure ulcer according to how deep it is so progress can be monitored. This will enable the most appropriate care to be chosen for your pressure ulcer.

## **Self care**

It is important that if possible you change position as often as possible. If you are not able to change position yourself nurses will help you.

If possible you should inspect your skin to check for signs of pressure ulcers if possible. If you notice possible damage it is important that you let your nurse know as soon as possible.

## **Eat a well-balanced diet**

Make sure you eat a healthy balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids. You can discuss this with your nurse.

## **Useful contacts**

If you require further information regarding pressure ulcer prevention and treatment please ask your doctor or nurse.



It is important to understand, if you decline pressure relieving equipment, your pressure areas or existing ulcers may heal much slower or could get worse.

We are committed to providing high quality care. If you have a suggestion, comment or complaint about the care or services you have received, or if you need this leaflet in another format, please contact the Director of Clinical Services on 01977 781468.

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Registered Charity No: 514999

Ref: 9064  
Version 5.0  
Issued July 2025  
Review October 2027