

# Preventing pressure ulcers

by involving patients/residents, families and friends

We want to make your stay with us as safe as possible and there are a number of ways that you can assist us to decrease your risk of developing a pressure ulcer.

Please take the time to read the following information designed to provide you, your family and friends with information to reduce your risk of developing a pressure ulcer.

### What is a pressure ulcer?

A pressure ulcer occurs when prolonged pressure restricts or cuts off blood supply to a particular area of skin resulting in skin breakdown.

They are also known as pressure sores or bedsores.

Pressure ulcers may look minor, such as redness on the skin, but they can hide more damage under the surface of the skin.

### Where are they found on the body?

Pressure ulcers usually occur over bony areas – especially heels, buttocks and toes.

### Who gets pressure ulcers?

People might get a pressure ulcer if they:

- are unable to move or have limited movement in bed or in a chair
- have a loss of sensation to touch/pressure/pain
- have loss of bowel or bladder control
- are not eating well.

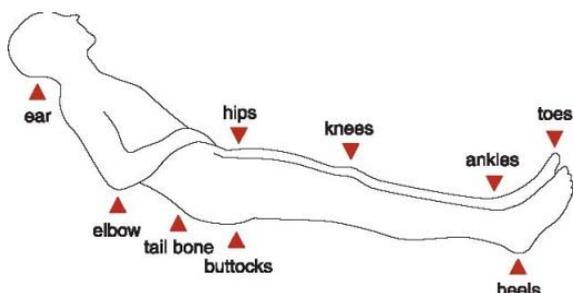


Figure 1: Bony areas where pressure ulcers can occur

### What can you do?

The three most important ways to prevent pressure ulcer are to:

- **Move, move, move**
- **Look after your skin**
- **Ensure adequate nutrition**

### Move, move, move

The best way to relieve pressure in bed is to keep active and change your position every hour. If you are unable to move yourself, the staff will help.

In a chair, sit up straight with your bottom well back in the chair and with your back touching the backrest. Your knees should be level with your hips. Never have your knees higher than your hips. Your feet should be resting flat on the floor (see Figure 2).

When you are sitting, lift your bottom up from the chair for 15 seconds every 30 minutes. This is also important if you sit on the toilet or commode chair for a long time (see Figure 3).



Figure 2



Figure 3

### Look after your skin

Skin becomes thinner and more fragile when you get older. The layer of fat under the skin also gets thinner which means that blood circulation is less protected and so your skin is more easily damaged.

We suggest that you:

- Keep your skin, clothes and bedding dry
- Bathe or shower in warm (not hot) water using a mild soap alternative
- Dry your skin gently and thoroughly
- Make sure you dry carefully between your toes
- Use a mild moisturiser such as fragrance-free Sorbolene
- Avoid massaging your skin over bony parts of the body
- Tell staff if you have any tenderness or soreness over a bony area, or if you see any red, blistered or broken skin.

### Ensure adequate nutrition

Good nutrition helps to prevent pressure ulcers and assists with the healing process. It is important to keep to a healthy body weight and to eat a variety of healthy foods:

- Lean meats, poultry, eggs and dairy products are good sources of protein which helps your skin to heal
- Zinc and iron rich foods including red meat, legumes, wholegrain breads and cereals and green leafy vegetables; other sources of zinc include eggs and dairy products
- Have oily fish often, such as salmon, sardines and tuna; these contain fish oils to help boost the body's natural defences and help fight infection
- Drink adequate amounts of fluid; hydration is important for maintaining good skin condition
- Vitamins C and E are important in wound healing so include plenty of fruits, vegetables, wholegrain breads and cereals in your diet.

Ask to see a dietitian if you have a pressure ulcer, have recently lost weight, have a poor appetite or are worried about your nutrition.

### Diabetes

If you have diabetes, aim to keep your blood sugar levels within the range recommended by your doctor, which will contribute to better healing.

### Smoking

Smoking reduces blood flow and damages blood vessels leading to overall poor skin health. It is advisable for your health not to smoke. Brochures about quitting are available on request.

### How to recognise the early warning signs

Check your skin twice a day. Let staff know if you notice possible or actual signs of damage immediately. If you are having difficulty checking your skin, ask staff for their help.

The signs to look for (especially on skin over bony areas) are:

- Red/purple/blue skin
- Blisters
- Swelling
- Dryness or dry patches
- Shiny areas
- Cracks, calluses or wrinkles

The signs to feel for are:

- Hard areas
- Warm areas
- Swollen skin over bony points



If you have a reddened or suspicious area on your skin, change your position.

**The best treatment for a pressure ulcer is the removal of all pressure from the location until it heals.**

### Special equipment

If St Vincent's staff assess that you are at high risk of developing a pressure ulcer, we may use a range of special equipment to help reduce pressure. This might include air mattresses, cushions, booties or heel protectors.

Reviewed by St Vincent's Skin Integrity Working Party 2010  
Intranet/Publications/Link to Brochures/Pressure Ulcer Prevention  
Info sheet