



ST VINCENT'S  
HOSPITAL  
MELBOURNE

A FACILITY OF ST VINCENT'S HEALTH AUSTRALIA

*Inspired  
by  
You*

# Stop Pressure Injury

A guide for Patients, Carers and Families

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

## WHAT IS A PRESSURE INJURY?

A pressure injury happens 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 ulcers or pressure sores. Pressure injuries 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 injuries usually occur over bony areas –especially heels, buttocks and toes.

## WHO GETS PRESSURE INJURIES?

Patients might get a pressure injury 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

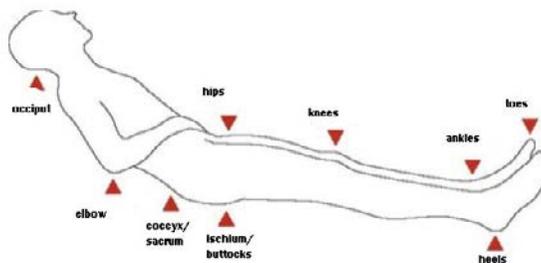
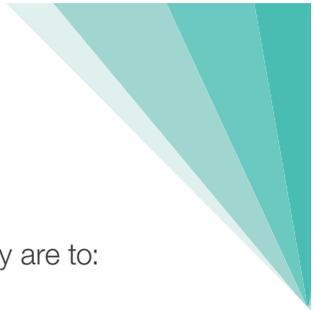


Figure 1: Bony areas where pressure ulcers can occur



## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

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

1. Move as much as possible
2. Look after your skin
3. Ensure adequate nutrition

### 1. MOVE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE

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, a member of your Care Team will help.



Figure 2: Lying 30° side tilt. Protects heels and buttocks.



Figure 3: Lying 30° head tilt. Heels not contacting the bed.

When you are sitting in a chair, sit up straight with your bottom well back in the chair, 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.

Lift each side of your bottom up from the chair for 15 seconds every 30 minutes. This is also important if you sit on the toilet or are in a Commode chair for a long time.



**Figure 4:** Correct sitting position



**Figure 5:** Relieve pressure by lifting your bottom



## 2. LOOK AFTER YOUR SKIN

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

- Keep your skin, clothes and bedding dry
- Bathe or shower in warm water using a mild soap alternative
- Dry your skin gently and thoroughly
- Dry carefully between your toes
- Use a mild moisturiser such as fragrance free Sorbolene
- Avoid massaging your skin over bony parts of your body
- Tell staff if you have any tenderness or soreness over a bony area, or if you see any red, blistered or broken skin

## 3. ENSURE ADEQUATE NUTRITION

Good nutrition helps to prevent pressure injury 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 help your skin to heal
- Include zinc and iron rich foods in your diet where possible including red meat, legumes, wholegrain breads, cereals and green leafy vegetables. Other sources of zinc include eggs and dairy products
- Eat oily fish often, such as salmon, sardines and tuna. These contain fish oils to help boost the body's natural defenses 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 injury, have recently lost weight, have a poor appetite or are worried about your diet.

## DIABETES

If you have diabetes, aim to keep your blood sugar levels within the range recommended by your doctor. This will help you to heal.

## SMOKING

Smoking can damage your blood vessels. This leads to poor skin health. Ask a Care Team member for a brochure if you would like to not top smoking.

## HOW TO RECOGNISE THE EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF A PRESSURE INJURY

Let your Care Team member know if you see any of these signs: (especially on skin over bony areas):

- 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 injury is the removal of all pressure from the location until it heals.**

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

## SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

If a member of your Care Team assess that you are at high risk of developing a pressure injury, we may use a range of special equipment to help reduce pressure. This might include an air mattress, cushions, protective dressings, heel wedges or other devices to protect heels.

## PICTURES OF PRESSURE INJURIES:

The heel and buttocks are the most common location for pressure injuries.



Heel Pressure Injury



Heel Pressure Injury



Buttocks Pressure Injury



Heel Pressure Injury



Buttocks Pressure Injury

## MORE INFORMATION

Ask your Care Team member to access the Victorian Quality Council, Patient Information Pressure Injury Prevention Brochure available under “Brochures” on the intranet.

*It is available in 7 languages.*

### References:

Pan Pacific Pressure Injury Advisory Panel.  
Victorian Quality Council

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Skin Integrity Working Party  
Consumer Advocate Committee

Intranet/Publications/Link to Brochures/Pressure Ulcer Prevention  
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