

PREVENTING PRESSURE ULCERS

WHAT IS A PRESSURE ULCER?

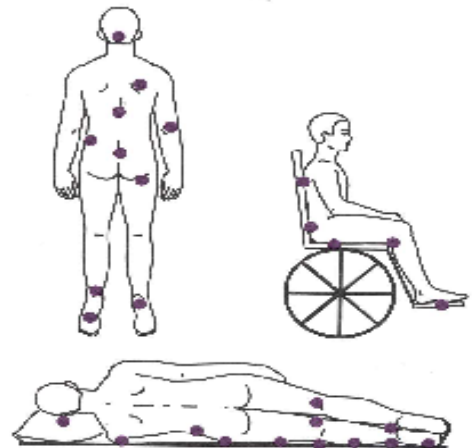
A pressure ulcer (also called a bed sore or decubitus ulcer or pressure sore) is an injury to the skin and tissue underneath due to unrelieved pressure. Pressure squeezes the tiny blood vessels shut and stops the supply of food and oxygen to the tissue. When tissue does not have food and oxygen for a period of time, the tissue dies and a pressure ulcer can develop. The pressure ulcer can appear as discolored or red skin over a bony area or the skin might even be open showing the tissues underneath.

WHAT ARE SOME FACTORS THAT INCREASE THE RISK FOR A PRESSURE ULCER DEVELOPING?

- Being confined to a bed or chair without the ability to change positions
- Moisture on the skin from urine, stool or sweating for a long period of time
- Age because skin is thinner, more fragile in the very young and the elderly
- Body size such as being overweight or too thin
- Not eating enough nutritious food or drinking enough fluid

WHERE DO PRESSURE ULCERS FORM?

Pressure ulcers can start as a red or discolored area on the skin that does not go away when the skin is pressed. Pressure ulcers usually occur over a bony area of the body such as the coccyx or tailbone, the heel, the hip, or the back of the head. The diagram shows some common pressure ulcer sites.



HOW CAN I PREVENT THEM FROM OCCURRING?

- Examine areas of your body exposed to pressure and watching for red or discolored skin.
- Protect your skin from dryness or moisture by applying moisturizers to keep skin from getting too dry.
- Clean skin as soon as possible after soiling from urine or stool.
- Apply ointments to protect skin from urine, stool or drainage.
- Limit pressure over bony parts by changing positions at least every one-to-two hours.
- Avoid friction by having someone lift instead of drag when changing positions.
- Prevent contact of one body part with another with pillows or wedges.
- Keep the head of your bed as low as possible to prevent sliding down in bed which can damage the skin.
- Keep your heels off the bed surface with pillow placed under your calves.
- Avoid using donut-shaped cushions when sitting.
- Eat a well-balanced diet to provide adequate protein, calories, and fluids.