

# Keeping Your Patient's Skin Healthy

## *A guide for caregivers*

*This guide for caregivers explains how to prevent skin breakdown in the patient they are caring for.*



*Plan a daily or weekly time to check your patient's skin for breakdown.*

**As a caregiver, you play an important role in helping prevent skin breakdown. You are a vital part of your patient's health care team!**

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your patient's doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

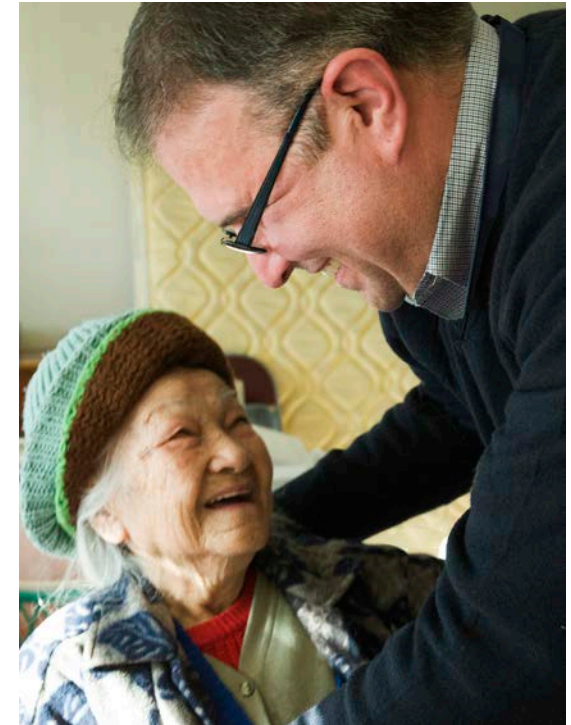
UWMC staff are also available to help.

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## What can caregivers do to help prevent skin breakdown?

Skin breakdown most often occurs over the bony areas of the body. These areas include the tailbone, heels, and hips.

- Plan a daily or weekly time to check your patient's skin. The best times for this are:
  - During bathing
  - When changing clothes
  - During toileting
- Before putting any tape on your patient's skin, first apply a liquid skin barrier or skin sealant.
- If your patient has diarrhea and/or urine incontinence, use an ointment with zinc oxide to protect their skin.

## What are pressure ulcers?

Pressure ulcers are skin injuries. They are also called "bedsores." They often occur over bony areas where the skin contacts the bed or chair. These areas include the heels, tailbone, elbows, shoulder blades, and back of the head. (See drawing below.)

## Why should the caregiver do a skin check?

- Pressure ulcers can increase your patient's risk for infection or worsen their overall health.
- All caregivers are part of the team in preventing skin problems.

## Who is at risk for skin breakdown?

People with fragile or thin skin, people with skin irritations due to incontinence, and the elderly are at greater risk for skin breakdown. Skin issues are also common in

people who have had skin breakdown before, or who have:

- Cancer
- Diabetes
- Decreased blood flow, with leg and ankle swelling
- Limited mobility
- Dehydration or poor nutrition
- Medical equipment that rubs their skin, such as tubes or face masks

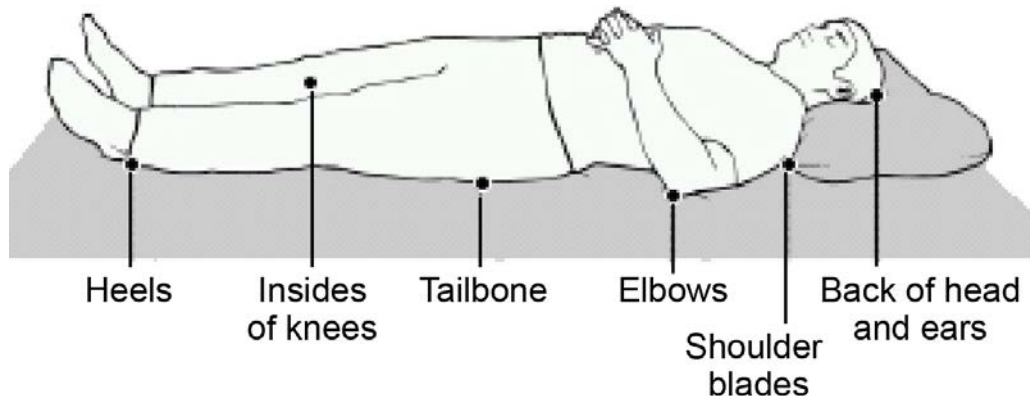
## How to Check for Skin Breakdown

- When removing your patient's shoes and socks, check their heels and the top and bottom of each foot.
- If your patient sits in a chair for 2 or more hours a day, lies in bed without turning on their side, or is incontinent, check their tailbone and around their anus and genitals daily.

## Signs to Watch For

Tell the primary health care provider if your patient has:

- Any signs of skin irritation, such as red areas or color changes
- Tears, sores, scabs, or bruising
- Existing wounds that get worse
- Signs of new incontinence



*This drawing shows areas where skin breakdown most often occurs.*