

# Preventing Pressure Injuries

## *What you and your family can do*

*This handout offers tips to help prevent pressure injuries while you are in the hospital and when you are at home.*

### What are pressure injuries?

Pressure injuries are often called “bedsores.” They are skin sores that form when muscles and the soft tissues of your body are squeezed against an outside surface, such as a chair or bed.

### Am I at risk for pressure injuries?

You are at risk if you:

- Do not move
- Stay in bed or a chair most of the time
- Lose bladder or bowel control
- Are overweight or underweight
- Have thin, dry, or fragile skin
- Are confused or restless
- Take steroids
- Take medicines that make you sleepy
- Need help getting from the bed to a chair or the toilet
- Do not eat a balanced diet or drink enough fluids

### Where do pressure injuries begin?

Pressure injuries can form almost anywhere on your body. They are most likely to form on these areas:

- Tailbone and spine
- Hip bones
- Heels and ankles
- Elbows
- Back of head and ears

### How can I keep my skin healthy?

- Keep your skin clean, and dry off well after bathing.
- Use lotion if your skin is dry.
- Eat a well-balanced diet.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Be as active as possible.
- Practice good hygiene. Urine and stool on your skin can cause pressure injuries to form quickly.
- Be careful not to drag yourself across the bed or chair. This can cause your skin to tear.



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## What can I do to help prevent pressure injuries?

- **Check your skin every day:** Look for red areas where pressure injuries often form, such as your tailbone, hips, heels, ankles, and elbows.
- **Be more active:** Try to walk and exercise. Physical therapy can help you increase your movement and activity.
- **Reduce pressure on your skin:**
  - If you are in bed, change your position at least every 2 to 3 hours. If you are sitting, change position more often.
  - Try to find comfortable positions that do not put pressure on red or sore spots.
  - Use pillows to protect bony parts. Avoid using donut-shaped pillows. These pillows take pressure off one area but put pressure on another area.
  - Float your heels off the bed or chair surface by placing a pillow under your calves.
  - Rest with the head of your bed as low as possible. This will keep you from sliding down the bed.
- **Take an active role in your care:**
  - Ask for help to get from the bed to your chair or toilet.
  - Tell your caregivers if you are wet so they can help you get clean and dry.
  - Wear disposable underwear.
  - Use protective cream to protect your skin from urine or stool.
  - Follow the guidelines to keep your skin healthy.

## While You Are in the Hospital

Your care team in the hospital will help you prevent pressure injuries. They will:

- Check your skin every shift for redness or signs of problems.
- Keep your skin clean and dry, and put lotion on your skin to keep it soft.
- Remind you to move and increase your activity. If needed, they will help you change your position in bed or chair every 2 to 3 hours.
- Place pillows under your calves to keep your heels off the bed, and anywhere else where pillows can protect your body.
- Keep the head of your bed as low as possible so that you do not slide down the bed.
- Help you get from the bed to the chair or toilet.
- Help protect your skin from urine or stool. This is done with cream and disposable pads.
- Help you get a well-balanced diet and enough fluids.
- Tell your doctor if they notice signs of skin problems.

**If your caregivers are not doing the things in this handout, please ask them to!**

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.