Intermountain® Healthcare

Preventing Pressure Ulcers

While you're ill you may be at greater risk for a pressure ulcer. A pressure ulcer (also called a **"bedsore"** or **"pressure sore"**) is caused by staying in one position too long. Prolonged pressure on your skin cuts off blood supply to the area. Without blood, the skin can weaken or die. Pressure ulcers occur most often where your bones are close to the skin, such as your back, hips, ankles, elbows, ears, and heels. Below are some ways to help prevent pressure ulcers.

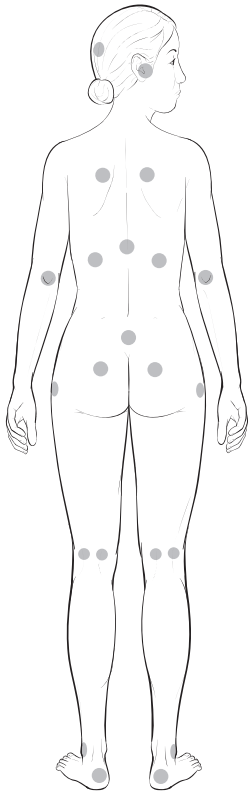
While you're in the hospital you and your nurses will work together to reduce the risk of pressure ulcers.

YOU *can do these things:*

- **Let us know** when you're uncomfortable or need help changing position. If a tube pressing on your skin bothers you, ask us to adjust it. If you can't feel pain or can't communicate, we'll be extra careful to make sure you're positioned well.
- **Change position at least every 2 hours.** Shift your weight, turn over, or reposition yourself. Changing position removes pressure and allows blood to circulate more freely.
- **Get up and walk,** if your doctor says it's okay. Walking improves your blood circulation and skin health.
- **Keep your skin clean and dry.** Dampness weakens the skin and makes pressure ulcers occur more easily. Using lotion every day helps prevent skin damage.
- **Prevent friction and shear. Friction** occurs when skin rubs against sheets, chairs, or clothing as you move. **Shear** occurs when skin is pulled one direction as the body moves in another, as when you slide down in a chair or bed.
- **Eat well.** Eat plenty of protein and calories from a variety of sources. Take a multi-vitamin daily.

YOUR NURSES *may do these things:*

- Avoid positioning you with your weight directly on your hip or tail bones.
- Use pillows or foam wedges to keep your ankles and knees from touching each other.
- Help you turn in bed or shift your weight in a chair every 1 to 2 hours (unless your doctor says not to).
- Consult with a physical therapist about what activities you can do.
- Keep your skin clean and dry. Apply lotion to your skin after bathing you.
- Monitor and treat the skin on your heels, elbows, hips, and tail bone.
- Keep the head of your bed at a 30° angle or less.
- Monitor your need for a special mattress.
- Consult with a dietitian about your nutrition needs.
- Tell all transporters and departments of your need for cushioning on hard surfaces.



Pressure ulcers occur most often in these areas

Pressure ulcers are a serious problem. You and your healthcare team can work together to prevent them.

When you go home you still need to be careful about pressure ulcers. If anyone is helping care for you, make sure they also know you need to do these things:

MOVE

- Change position at least every 2 hours. Shift your weight, turn over, or reposition yourself. You may want to use an alarm or timer to help you remember.
- Get up and walk, if your doctor says it's okay.

CHECK

- **Check your skin often** during the day, especially if you're in bed or in a chair most of the time. You may need to use a mirror to see everywhere. Or, you can ask someone to help you. Look for:
  - Areas of redness over bony places, such as your tailbone, hips, elbows, heels, ears and ankles.
  - Changes in the color or appearance of your skin.
  - Areas which are more pink, red, bluish, more pale or shiny than surrounding skin.
  - Blisters, bruises, cracks, scrapes or any opening in the skin surface.
  - Damp or moist skin, or places where the skin is dry or flaky.
- **Feel your skin** and compare it to surrounding skin. Feel for any areas that may be:
  - Firm or hard
  - Swollen
  - Either warm or cool

PROTECT

- **Keep your skin clean and dry.** You may want to use moisture barrier products on skin that is often wet from sweating, wound drainage, or urine.
  - If sheets or dressings are wet, change them often.
  - Avoid harsh soaps and skin care products with alcohol in them.
  - Avoid using hot water or heating pads.
- **Protect your skin from friction, shearing and rubbing.**
  - If your skin is wet or damp, gently pat it dry with a towel. Do not rub your skin.
  - Avoid massage over bony areas such as the hips, tailbone, shoulders and ankles.

REST SAFELY

- **In bed, don't use multiple layers of linens or underpads**. The extra layers can wrinkle when you lie on them and increase the risk of pressure ulcers. Extra layers also make your skin warmer, and more damp.
  - Don't use multiple layers of linens.
  - Keep the bottom sheet free from wrinkles.
  - Clean up any crumbs from your bed or chair, and don't place items on the bed.
- **In a chair, reduce pressure on sensitive areas**
  - Sit up straight in the chair and shift your weight from one side to the other every 15 minutes.
  - Use a foot rest or foot stool to support your feet so there is less pressure on the backs of your knees.
  - Use a special seat cushion or pad that is made to reduce pressure.
  - Do not sit on a ring or "donut" cushion. Do not use sheepskin.

EAT WELL

Eat plenty of protein and calories from a variety of sources. Drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluids each day to keep you skin healthy. Take a multivitamin daily.

CALL your doctor or homecare nurse if you have:

- Pink, red, purple or blue areas on your skin from pressure.
- Skin over a bony area that feels firm, warm or cool compared to the skin around it.
- Any open sores, shiny spots, blisters or places where the skin has been rubbed or scraped off.

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