

Preventing Pressure Ulcers

What is a pressure ulcer?

A **pressure ulcer** is a sore that is caused by lying down or sitting in the same position for too long. If there is pressure on your skin for too long, it can cut off the blood supply to the area. The skin gets weak and can die without enough blood. **Pressure ulcers are a serious problem.**

Pressure ulcers are also called **bedsores** or **pressure sores**. They occur most often where your bones are close to the surface of the skin like your heels, ankles, hips, back, elbows, ears, head, and behind the knees.

How can I prevent pressure ulcers while in the hospital?

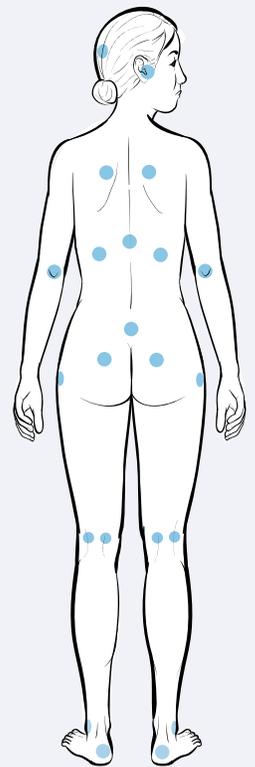
While you're in the hospital, you and your healthcare team will work together to prevent pressure ulcers.

YOU can do these things:

- **Tell your nurse when you're uncomfortable** or need help changing position.
- **Change your position in bed at least every 1 to 2 hours.** This takes pressure off some parts of your skin and lets blood come back to the area. Good blood flow keeps your skin healthy and strong.
- **Get up and walk** if your doctor says it's okay.
- **Keep your skin clean and dry.** Wet skin can get damaged more easily. Use skin lotion daily to avoid dry skin.
- **Protect your skin from rubbing** against sheets, chairs, or clothing.
- **Keep your skin from pulling** in one direction as your body moves in another direction. This can happen when you slide down in a chair or bed.
- **Eat a variety of healthy foods and get plenty of protein.** Foods high in healthy proteins include milk, eggs, cheese, yogurt, beans, seafood, soy, and white meat like chicken and turkey. Take a multi-vitamin each day.

YOUR NURSES may do these things:

- **Keep unnecessary weight off** of your hips and tailbone.
- **Use pillows or foam wedges** to keep your ankles and knees from touching each other.
- **Tell other healthcare workers about your need for cushioning** on hard surfaces.
- **Help you turn in bed or shift your weight in a chair every 1 to 2 hours.**
- **Keep the head of your bed at a 30° angle or less.**
- **See if you need a special mattress.**
- **Speak with a physical therapist** about what activities you can do.
- **Keep your skin clean and dry.** A nurse may put lotion on your skin after bathing you.
- **Check and treat the skin** on your heels, ankles, hips, back, elbows, ears, head, and behind the knees.
- **Check with a nutrition specialist** about your food needs.



Pressure ulcers occur most often in these areas

How can I prevent pressure ulcers when I return home?

You still need to be careful about pressure ulcers when you return home from the hospital. You and those who care for you can follow the steps below.



Move often

- **In bed, change your position at least every 1 to 2 hours.** You can shift your weight or turn over. You may want to use an alarm or timer to help you remember when it's time to move.
- **In a chair, sit up straight and shift your weight from one side to the other every 15 minutes.**
- **Get up and walk** if your doctor says it's okay.



Check your skin often

- **Check your skin** 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 like your heels, ankles, knees, hips, back, elbows, and head
 - Blisters, bruises, cracks, scrapes, or any opening in the skin
 - Damp or moist skin as well as places where the skin is dry or flaky
- **Feel your skin** and compare it to the surrounding area. Feel for any areas that may be:
 - Firm or hard
 - Swollen
 - Either warm or cool



Protect your skin

- **Keep your skin clean and dry.**
 - Change sheets or bandages often if they get wet.
 - Avoid harsh soaps and skin care products that contain alcohol.
 - Avoid using hot water or heating pads.
 - Ask your pharmacist or healthcare provider about **moisture protection products**. They can protect skin that is often wet from sweating, wound drainage, or urine.
- **Protect your skin from rubbing and pulling.**
 - If your skin gets wet, gently pat it dry with a towel.
 - Avoid massage over bony areas.



Arrange your space wisely

- **Avoid using extra layers of linens or underpads.** The extra layers can wrinkle when you lie on them and make it easier to get a pressure ulcer. Extra layers also make your skin warmer and more damp.
- **Clean up any crumbs** from your bed or chair.
- **Keep unnecessary items off your bed.**
- **In a chair, reduce pressure on sensitive areas by using:**
 - A foot rest or footstool to support your feet so there is less pressure behind your knees.
 - A special seat cushion or pad that reduces pressure. Avoid sitting on a ring or “donut” cushion since it puts more pressure on some areas of the skin. Also, avoid using sheepskin for cushioning.



Eat Well

- **Eat a variety of healthy foods and get plenty of protein.** Foods high in healthy proteins include milk, eggs, cheese, yogurt, beans, seafood, soy, and white meat like chicken and turkey.
- **Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water each day.**
- **Take a multi-vitamin each day.**



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 hard, 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*