

Preventing Pressure Injury During a Hospital Stay

What is a pressure injury?

A pressure injury is an area of damage to your skin and the tissue under your skin caused by pressure. This can happen from sitting or lying in the same position. Often it develops over bony areas on your buttocks, back, hips or heels. “Pressure ulcers”, “Pressure sores” or “Bedsore” are other names for pressure injuries.

What does a pressure injury look like?

- The area is red, the skin feels warm, tight or painful and the redness might not go away even if you are not lying on it.
- The area can have a break in the skin and an open wound.
- If the tissue below the skin gets damaged you will have a wound that can look like a reddish-pink, shallow crater.
- Some wounds look like blisters and can burst.
- Some severe pressure wounds are so deep that you can see muscle or bone.
- Some areas look grayish black and have deep tissue injury, but it is not an open wound yet.

What are the causes?

- Moisture from sweat, urine, stool or wound drainage
- Pressure from tubes or devices: oxygen tubing, feeding tube, drainage tubes, breathing tube, urinary catheter, orthopedic devices

What are the risk factors?

- Inability to change position or being bed-bound

- Older age: thinner skin and less fat tissue
- Poor nutrition and dehydration
- Decreased ability to feel pressure, numbness, or poor blood flow to your limbs
- Having surgery or procedures that take over 6 hours
- Diabetes, Stroke, bad circulation, Spinal cord injury
- Previous pressure injuries

What can I do to prevent pressure injuries?

Skin Care

Do:

- Cleanse your skin regularly with mild soap and warm water, avoid hot water.
- Cleanse skin quickly after sweating, wound drainage or urinary or bowel accident (incontinence).
- Use only one incontinence pad or use breathable incontinence pads.
- Use moisturizing cream daily on dry skin.
- Check your skin, esp. bony prominences daily, or have someone else check it.
- Let your nurse or doctor know right away if you see or feel any area where the surface of the skin is broken.
- Check and protect the skin under tubes or orthopedic devices.

Don't:

- Don't massage any red or discolored pressure points.

Nutrition

- Make sure to eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- Ask about nutritional supplements.
- Drink enough fluids, if allowed.

Repositioning

If you spend a lot of time in a bed you can do the following:

- Avoid lying or sitting on an area that has redness, tenderness, unnatural coloring or a wound.
- While in bed: turn your body at least every 2 hours from side to side and back.
- Keep the head of your bed at a 30-degree angle or lower, so there is not too much pressure on the bones (hip when lying on side, tailbone when lying on your back).
- Place a pillow between your ankles and knees when lying on your side.
- Place a pillow under your lower legs to elevate the heels when lying on your back.
- When sitting, change your position every 15 minutes by tilting your body forward or to the side so that your bottom lifts off the seat.
- Stand up or do “pushups” by using arms to raise off the seat every hour.

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by Michigan Medicine for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by Michigan Medicine and for which Michigan Medicine does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Patient Education by [Michigan Medicine](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](#). Last Revised 01/2018