

Reducing the risks of getting a pressure ulcer (bed sore, pressure sore)

What is a pressure ulcer?

Pressure ulcers are a type of skin wound which occurs when parts of your body are placed under too much pressure causing damage to the skin. This may look like redness or can develop into a break in the skin. Sometimes damage to the skin is caused through friction or Shearing (this looks like a grazed area) which can happen due to poor manual handling.

If your skin is untreated, over time you may be able to see underlying bone and muscle. At this stage you are at high risk of serious infection and may have to attend the hospital for intensive treatment.

The nursing team can help to reduce the risk of developing a pressure ulcer by advising on how to reduce pressure to your skin, preventing any further damage.

Causes of pressure ulcers

Pressure on the skin, reduces the blood supply which causes damage to your skin.

If the pressure is not removed the tissues under the skin begin to die.

The parts of your body most at risk of getting pressure ulcers are:

- bottom
- heels or toes
- hips
- spine (back)
- shoulders
- elbows
- ears
- knees and ankles
- tail bone (the small bone at the bottom of your spine, called a coccyx)

Continued overleaf...

Originator: Tissue Viability Service



Factors that increase the risk of pressure ulcer development

- reduced ability to walk
- sitting or lying down in one position for a long time
- lack of appetite and fluid intake
- problems getting to the toilet, wet or moist skin from sweating or from urine or stools
- long term illnesses eg diabetes
- some medications
- older people may have delicate skin
- pressure relieving rings are not advised as this may cause a pressure ulcer
- equipment that causes localised pressure
- smoking

At times, even when equipment and advice has been followed, a pressure ulcer can still develop. Whilst under the care of the nursing team, they will continually assess and support you to help reduce risk.

Ways you can reduce the risk of pressure ulcers developing

- the nurse will assess your personal needs
- the nurse will ask to see your pressure areas to assess for damage
- the nurse will recommend the use of special equipment such as a cushion and mattresses to protect your skin, according to your level of risk
- the nurse will offer you advice to reduce the risk of pressure ulcers or stop them getting worse
- the nurse will talk to your family or carers if they are helping you
- you are at low risk of developing a pressure ulcer the nurse will discuss this leaflet with you and your carer/family member, this will help you and carers identify if your health changes and the discharge letter will give you information of who to contact

Nutrition

Eating a good diet reduces the risk of a pressure ulcer developing and can help speed up the healing process. If needed, the nurse will refer you to a dietician. Poor fluid intake is a big risk factor as when you do not drink enough fluid, your skin can become thin and fragile and you may develop a pressure ulcer.

Checking your skin - Self-care

If you have known risk factors for pressure ulcers, it is important that you (or your carer) check your skin on a daily basis for any signs of redness or sores. This is especially important if you have any nerve damage or diabetes, as this can reduce feelings of pain in certain parts of your body.

You can use a mirror to check parts of your body that are hard to see, such as your back or bottom, or ask your carer to help you.

Contact your Community Nursing Team if you notice any signs of damage or changes in your skin that you are concerned about or are causing you pain.



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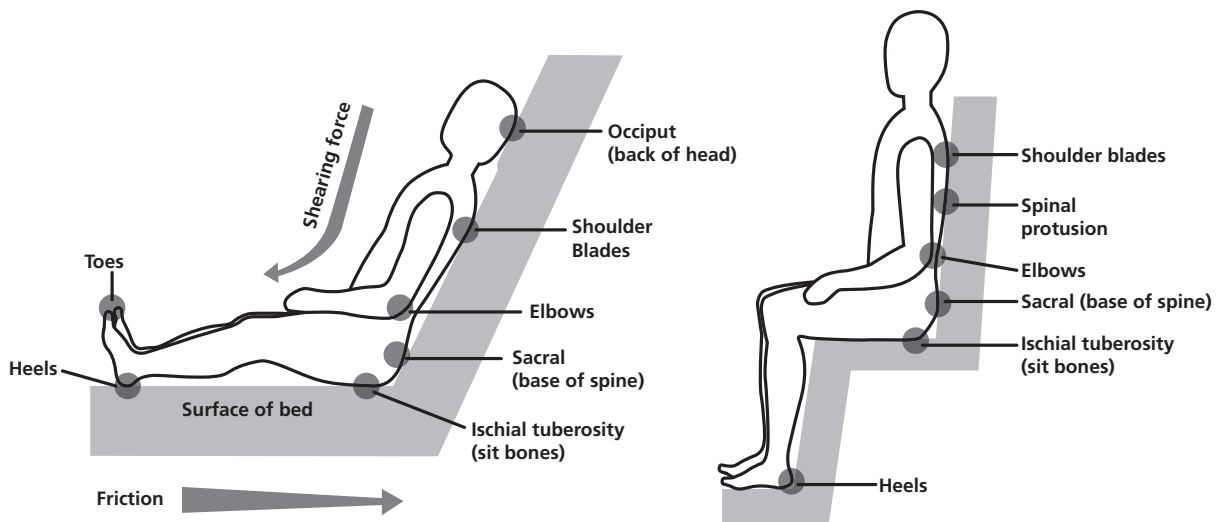
Risks of not following nursing advice

If you choose not to follow the nurses advice, pressure ulcers may occur or get worse. This can result in serious illness and you may have to go to hospital where you could require surgery and further treatment.

Sometimes you will need to make changes within your home to make room for special equipment that you need. The nurses will always explain and discuss how best to meet your needs as they understand it can be difficult to cope with changes when you are not feeling well.

The nurses will always listen to you and if needed will talk to you and your carers, family and with your GP to help keep you safe and free from harm.

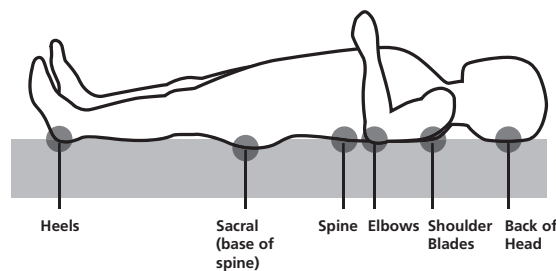
Areas on your skin at risk of pressure sores/bed sores when sitting and lying down



Semi reclining position

The seated position

Supine position (lying on back)



Lateral position (lying on side)

