

Preventing Pressure Injury

What is a pressure injury?

- Pressure injuries (also called bed sores) are painful spots on the skin that happen when someone can't move around easily.
- These sores damage the skin and may open, causing pain and serious infections.
- People who stay in bed or sit in a chair for a long time are more likely to get them.
- Other things like not eating or drinking well, getting older, being sick, wet skin, or wrinkled sheets can also cause pressure ulcers.
- Some pressure ulcers can be prevented, but not all.

How to prevent pressure injury

Pressure injury happens most often on bony areas like the tailbone, elbows, knees, heels, and head.

Prevent them by:

- Changing positions every two hours in bed and every hour in a chair.
- If possible, encourage the person to shift their weight every 15 minutes.
- Use a supportive draw sheet to move the person in bed.
- Keep the skin clean and dry.
- Consider using special mattresses, elbow pads, or heel pads.
- Cornstarch can help reduce skin injury from friction.

Symptoms of pressure injury

- Red or pale spots on the skin, especially over bony areas like the tailbone, hips, ankles, or elbows.
- Pain or discomfort in the reddened or pale areas
- Pale areas over bony points may mean the blood supply has been cut off

What can you do to help with pressure injury?

- Reposition the person and help with gentle exercises every two hours in bed and every hour in a chair.
- Encourage the person to move their toes, arms, or legs if they can.
- Use pillows under the calves to keep heels raised.
- Check pressure points and tell the nurse about any changes.
- Keep the skin clean and dry.
- Use alcohol-free lotions for dry skin.
- Wash the skin with warm water and mild soap.
- Tell the nurse if splints, braces, or oxygen tubing are causing irritation.
- Avoid sitting in one position for a long time.
- Avoid putting weight on a pressure ulcer.
- Avoid rubbing or massaging reddened or pale areas.
- Avoid using heat lamps, plastic sheets, or donut-shaped cushions.

What should you report to your care team?

- Red or pale spots on skin over bony areas, like the tailbone, hips, ankles, or elbows
- Pain or discomfort in these areas

Other helpful resources

Caregiver Confidence

Hospice Training for Caregivers and Families: Moving Safely