

Greenwich Hospital
P R E S S U R E U L C E R S
PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET

What is a pressure ulcer?

A pressure ulcer (previously called a 'bed sore') is an injury to the skin and underlying tissue caused by pressure for a long period of time. A pressure ulcer develops over a bony area of the body such as the coccyx (tailbone), heel, or hip. It may be minor, resulting only in redness of the skin, or may become an open wound.

Who is at risk for developing a pressure ulcer?

Any person who remains in the same position for a long time is at risk of developing a pressure ulcer. Elderly persons generally have thinner, more fragile skin, and are therefore at risk for developing pressure ulcers. Certain diseases such as anemia, cancer, diabetes, heart, vascular and kidney disease also are associated with pressure ulcers. Conditions or risk factors that increase the likelihood of developing a pressure ulcer include:

- Prolonged immobility (remaining in the same position for extended periods of time)
- Prolonged exposure to moisture (from incontinence or perspiration)
- Poor nutrition
- Diminished sensation (inability to feel pressure/pain)

In general, the more risk factors present, the greater the likelihood of developing a pressure ulcer.

How does immobility increase the risk for a pressure ulcer?

In general, individuals that are bed-or chair-bound experience prolonged pressure and shear or friction that puts them at risk for developing a pressure ulcer. This occurs through:

- Skin rubbing against the bed sheets or chair
- Skin being pulled from repeated episodes of sliding down in the bed or chair
- Heels sliding against the bed linens
- Friction on the skin caused by repeated episodes of pulling up in the bed or chair

How are pressure ulcers prevented?

In general, prevention is achieved through regular activity, good nutrition, and keeping the skin clean and dry.

Activity & Pressure Prevention:

- Frequent turning or repositioning (at least every 2 hours while in bed and every hour when sitting in chair)
- Foam or air mattresses
- Use of pillows for comfort and positioning
- Elbow and heel protectors
- Regular activity including physical therapy if ordered by your physician

Nutrition:

- Eating and drinking fluids in sufficient quantities
- Eating foods supplying adequate protein, zinc and vitamins A and C.
- Taking a multivitamin and nutritional supplements if ordered by your physician.

Skin Care:

- Moisture barrier creams or sprays
- Frequent cleansing, changing of incontinent patients
- Foam seat cushions (NO “donut” cushions)

In spite of best efforts at prevention, pressure ulcers do sometimes develop. Report skin redness or breaks in the skin to your nurse or physician.

For more Patient Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhosp.org and click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education