

Taking the pressure off

Preventing Pressure Injuries

What is a pressure injury?

- It forms when the skin starts to break down because of staying in the same position for too long without moving
- It can present with a change of skin colour or a blister and may become an open wound. It may become infected
- It occurs most often over bony protrusions (e.g., hips, heels, tail bone)

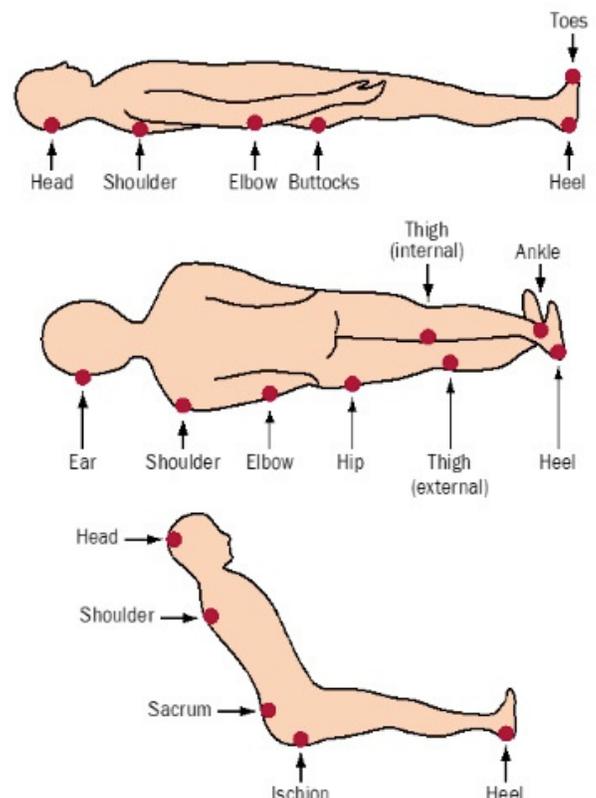
What are the risk factors of developing a pressure injury?

- Decreased mobility or needing help to move
- Decreased activity
- Difficulty expressing pain (e.g., Alzheimer, dementia, stroke)
- Inability to feel pain (reduced ability to know when to change position)
- Age: older adults have thinner skin, and often have poorer nutrition
- Weight (overweight or underweight): a thinner person does not have “protective padding” under their bones, while an overweight person has poor circulation and a lot of pressure on their tissues
- Bladder and bowel control problems: contact of skin with urine and stool increases moisture
- Poor diet or a diet lacking the proper nutrients
- Use of cigarettes or drugs
- Various medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, peripheral vascular disease, cancer, etc.).

How do they develop?

- Injuries are caused when soft tissue is squeezed between a solid surface (such as a chair seat or mattress) and a bone, pinching off tiny blood vessels (pressure)
- Rubbing or friction can remove the top layer of skin
- When skin sticks to a surface and the rest of the body moves, such as when transferring, blood vessels can tear. This is called shearing
- Moisture from sweating, urine, or stool can make skin more fragile

What body parts are most at risk?



What should I look for on my skin?

- If I am bedbound or my mobility is decreased, I must inspect my skin often, especially in vulnerable areas, looking for these signs:
 - Redness that does not go away 30 minutes after pressure is relieved
 - Change in colour (reddish, purplish, blackish) of a specific area, especially over bone
 - Scratches, blisters, other lesions
- If I cannot examine my skin by myself, I must ask for help (caregiver, family, orderly, etc.)



**Do not ignore any skin colour changes and lesions.
This is a serious warning sign!**

Why should I worry?

A pressure injury can:

- Be painful and smell bad
- Get worse if ignored
- Interfere with social activities and decrease mobility
- Be expensive to treat and require many visits to the doctor or clinic
- Become infected, sometimes requiring antibiotics and even hospitalization
- Delay the return home when hospitalized
- Cause absences from work, a loss of income
- Result in death In extreme cases

How do I prevent pressure injuries?

Reduce pressure, by changing position

- In a seated position:
 - Almost half of your body's weight rests on the "sit bones"
 - In a wheelchair, use the foot supports when recommended since they can help to distribute your weight
 - Lift your buttocks every hour (pushing up on the armrests or leaning forward) for about one minute
- When lying down:
 - Change position every two hours (when in bed, alternate between your back and sides)
 - Head of bed no more than 30° unless medically not recommended (on your side at a 30° angle, not 90°)
 - Use a pillow between your legs, knees, and ankles
 - Keep your heels elevated and off the mattress
 - Avoid folds and wrinkles in sheets and clothes that may cause a pressure point

Have a healthy lifestyle to keep your skin healthy

- Drink six cups of liquid a day, if recommended by the doctor (alcohol, coffee and tea do not count)
- Eat well and keep a balanced diet high in protein: vitamin or protein (*Ensure, Boost*) supplements, if necessary
- Use a pH-balanced soap
- Avoid water that is too hot, it can dry out your skin and pat to dry (avoid to rub)
- Use a moisturizing cream
- Stop smoking and do exercise

Reduce moisture

- Keep your skin clean and dry
- Change incontinence briefs or dirty sheets quickly
- Wear cotton clothing to allow sweat to evaporate
- If incontinent of urine or stool, use a barrier cream

Reduce friction when transferring

- Lift your buttocks before transferring to prevent the skin from sticking to the bed or the chair
- Lift the person when raising them in the bed and use a piqué whenever possible

What you should not do?

- Do not use a donut-shaped cushion
- Do not rub reddened or discolored areas
- Don't use sheepskin or pillows as cushions



Information

This guide has been written for the users of the CIUSSS and their families. It does not replace the advice of a health care professional.

If you have any questions, please contact your healthcare professional.