
Preventing pressure ulcers

Pressure Ulcer Multidisciplinary Team

Patient Information



What is a pressure ulcer?

A pressure ulcer (also known as a bed sore) is an area of damaged skin that is usually caused by sitting or lying in the same position for too long. A lack of blood circulation to the area of skin causes it to become an open wound. Medical devices such as oxygen masks or tubing can cause pressure ulcers too.

A pressure ulcer can be painful, distressing and could lead to a longer stay in hospital.

Have you checked your skin?

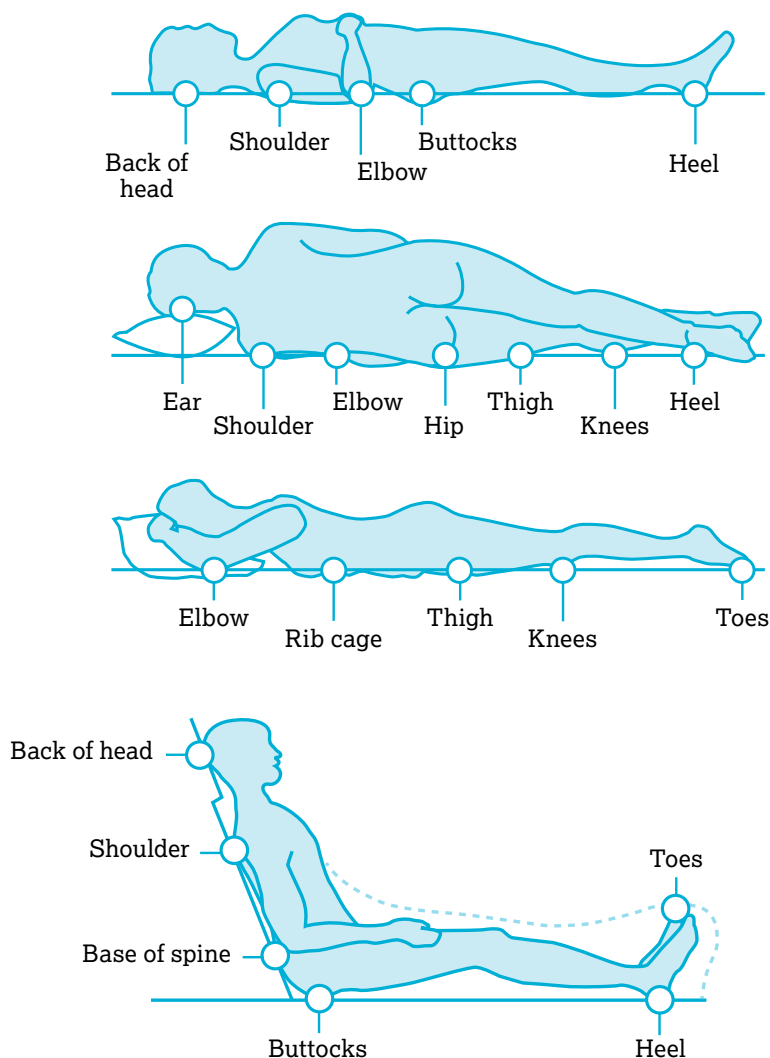
If you have any damage to your skin, please let your healthcare team know as soon as possible.



Where on the body can I develop pressure ulcers?

Pressure ulcers usually happen on the bony parts of the body such as the bottom, heels and hips, but they can happen anywhere.

Common locations of pressure ulcers



Am I at risk of pressure ulcers?

You will be more at risk if you:

- Sit or lie in the same position for too long
- Have poor circulation
- Have lost weight
- Have reduced sensation in any part of the body
- Have other medical conditions such as diabetes
- Are prescribed certain medications such as chemotherapy or steroids
- Are having surgery or radiotherapy
- Have a poor diet and do not drink enough fluids
- Have wet skin from incontinence or sweat
- Are using a splint or other medical equipment such as oxygen tubing/mask.

What can I do to prevent myself developing a pressure ulcer?

- **Surface** – do you have the best surface (mattress/cushion) for your skin? Alert your healthcare professional immediately if you see or feel something different on your skin
- **Skin inspection** – check your skin regularly for the early signs of pressure ulcers such as red or purple skin, discoloured areas or blisters
- **Keep moving** – change your position regularly so you are not sitting or lying on the same area of skin for too long
- **Incontinence** – keep your skin clean and dry
- **Nutrition** – monitor your diet and aim to choose meals with high calories and extra protein. Ensure you have enough fluids each day.

What can my healthcare team do to help prevent me developing a pressure ulcer?

Ward Nurse

- Assess your risk for pressure ulcers every day
- Help you to reposition regularly if you are unable to do this yourself
- Advise you if a special mattress/cushion could help your skin circulation
- Weigh you regularly to ensure you are not losing weight
- Encourage you to drink an adequate amount
- Refer you to the below specialists, if needed.

Physiotherapist and Occupational Therapist

- Provide you with an exercise plan to keep you as independent and mobile as possible by improving/maintaining muscle tone
- Provide you with a care plan for positioning, seating and specialist equipment.

Dietitian

- Monitor your nutritional intake and weight
- Give advice on the best menu choices to maintain your skin's health and strength
- Prescribe you extra supplements or special feeding regimes to enhance your calorie and protein intake.

Tissue Viability Nurse (wound specialist)

- Assess any wounds you may have
- Provide you with a comprehensive care plan to aid healing.

Your healthcare team will help you to check your skin regularly, especially areas you cannot see.

Further information

The NHS website: [*www.nhs.uk/conditions/pressure-sores/*](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pressure-sores/)

Contact details

The Royal Marsden Hotline: 020 8915 6899

You can ring the hotline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Call us straight away if you are feeling unwell or are worried about the side effects of cancer treatments.

This service provides specialist advice and support to all Royal Marsden patients, as well as to their carers, and both hospital and community-based doctors and nurses caring for Royal Marsden patients.

References

This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre

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No conflicts of interest were declared in the production of this booklet.

Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

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