



Many patients in the hospital are at risk for developing pressure ulcers. A pressure ulcer, also known as a bed sore, is an area of skin that breaks down when you stay in one position for too long without shifting your weight. The constant pressure against the skin reduces the blood supply to that area, the affected tissue dies. In addition, skin breakdown can occur when skin slides against a bony area. This is called shearing.

You may be at risk for pressure ulcers if you:

- Are elderly
- Are unable to move certain parts of your body
- Have poor circulation (as in diabetes or a vascular disease)
- Are sensitive to pain or discomfort
- Have moist skin or a weeping wound
- Have fragile skin
- Are malnourished or underweight
- Are bedridden or in a wheelchair

Here are ways for you and your family to take action to protect your skin when you are sitting or lying down.



Sitting

When sitting in bed, in a cardiac chair, in a regular chair, or in a wheelchair, you may be at risk for developing a pressure ulcer.

- Shift your weight every 15 minutes (note photo).
- There is less padding on the seat of a wheelchair, so you may wish to sit on a pillow or special cushion.
- Use pillows under your arms and legs; a pillow between your legs can keep pressure off knees and ankles when angled to the side in the chair or bed (note photo).
- Utilize the foot rest on the bed or wheelchair to help prevent yourself from sliding down, placing extra pillows under your feet if needed.



Lying in Bed

When lying in bed, you may be at risk for developing a pressure ulcer.

- If you are on bedrest, your position should be changed every two hours or as instructed.
- Use pillows under your arms and legs; a pillow between your legs can keep pressure off knees and ankles when angled to the side (see photo).
- Keep the bedsheets as free of creases as possible.
- Do not let your heels touch the bed; instead use pillows under your calves to lift your heels up when lying flat (see photo).
- Keep the head of your bed down except for meals. This will decrease the pressure and shearing on your tailbone. If you must have your head elevated, your knees should be raised, and your position changed frequently.

Prevention

Check your skin every day. Your family members or other care givers can help with this also. Pressure ulcers form most commonly over bony areas (bones close to the skin) like the tailbone, elbow, heels, hips, ankles, shoulders, back, and the back of the head.

- **Look for reddened areas that when pressed, do not turn white, and for blistered or painful areas. Report any of these symptoms to your doctor or nurse**
- **Make frequent position changes**
- **Prevent shearing**
- **Eat a balanced diet**
- **Increase your activity when able**
- **Keep your skin clean and dry**