

Working Together to Prevent Pressure Ulcers



This info sheet has been developed to answer commonly asked questions by patients and families regarding pressure ulcers and the preventative actions that both patients and families can take to prevent pressure ulcers.

What is a Pressure Ulcer?

Pressure ulcers (previously called bed sores) are a change or break in the skin caused by constant pressure - usually over a bony area such as a tailbone or heel. Pressure ulcers can become a serious problem depending on damage to the skin and how deep the wound stretches down to the underlying bone.

How do Pressure Ulcers Develop?

Pressure ulcers develop when there is constant pressure on a body part that causes the skin and tissue underneath to be pressed together against another surface such as a bed mattress or chair. This pressure prevents blood flow to the skin and tissue causing the skin to break down.

The skin can also be affected when the body part is dragged, slid or rubbed against a surface such as the bed sheet. This is called **friction** or **shear**.

Who is at Risk for Pressure Ulcers?

Anyone, young or old, can get a pressure ulcer. People who are the most at risk are those who:

- Have limited movement and cannot change positions themselves
- Cannot feel pain due to an injury, disease or medication
- Have impaired ability to communicate
- Have loss of bladder and/or bowel function
- Have poor diet and/or do not drink enough water
- Have had surgery, such as orthopaedic hip or knee surgery
- Are 70 years of age or older
- Are seriously ill

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Where do Pressure Ulcers Develop?

- Tailbone
- Heels
- Hips
- Elbows
- Ankles
- Knees
- Shoulders
- Spine

Can Pressure Ulcers be Prevented?

Yes, most pressure ulcers can be prevented. Preventing pressure ulcers is a team effort. The team includes the patient, their families, Nurses, Dietitians, Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists and Physicians.

What You and Your Family Can Do

If you are able to - change your position often. Change positions every two hours while in bed or shift your weight every 15 minutes if in a chair. If you are unable to do this, then ask for help.

Keep the head of your bed lower than 30 degrees to reduce pressure, friction and shear forces on your bottom.

Make sure to eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids (unless your doctor has specified your dietary needs). If you are unable to handle a balanced diet, ask your nurse to speak to a dietitian about nutritional supplements.

How HHS is Preventing Pressure Ulcers

Halton Healthcare Services' prevention plan includes both a skin assessment and pressure ulcer risk assessment for all admitted adult patients. These evaluations allow nurses and **patients** to develop a patient specific plan of care. As an organization we evaluate our pressure ulcer prevention effectiveness through yearly studies.

Questions?

If you have any questions or concerns, please talk to your doctor, nurse or member of your health care team. Make sure that you understand how you can help to prevent pressure ulcers and speak up if you have questions. We are here to help!

Canadian Association of Wound Care Pressure Ulcer Awareness Program.
You can get more information at www.preventpressureulcers.ca.



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