

Tell your health care provider if any area of your skin looks unusual, or if you have pain from your heels, tailbone or buttocks. Pain may mean you have too much pressure on your skin.

**If you must stay in bed for long periods of time:**

- Try to keep the head of your bed as low as you can. If you need to raise it, raise it to the lowest point possible for the shortest amount of time.
- Use pillows to keep your knees and ankles from touching each other.
- Avoid lying directly on your hip bone when on your side. Your care team can show you how to spread your weight more evenly.
- To keep your heels off the bed, place pillows under your legs from mid-calf to ankle. Never place pillows under the knee.
- Your caregiver may want to use a turning pad/sheet to help you change positions.
- If you cannot turn easily, ask your health care team if you need an air mattress overlay or specialty bed to decrease the pressure.

**Be active in your health care:**

- Involve your family and caregivers.
- Ask questions. Be sure you know what is being done and why.
- Explain your needs, wants and concerns.
- Learn what is best for you.

# Preventing Pressure Ulcers

*How you can assist your health care team*



For a physician referral, call 517.975.7575.

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## Preventing Pressure Ulcers

### What is a Pressure Ulcer?

Pressure ulcers, sometimes called bedsores, can cause serious problems for older adults in the hospital and at home. A pressure ulcer is an injury to the skin and the tissue beneath it. Pressure ulcers can slow your recovery, causing pain, infection and other problems.

Pressure ulcers tend to occur over bony body parts (elbow, heel, hip, tail bone, etc.) where you sit or lie for long periods of time. The unrelieved pressure squeezes tiny blood vessels which supply the skin with nutrients and oxygen. When skin goes without nutrients and oxygen for too long, a pressure ulcer can form.

A pressure ulcer begins on the inside and works its way outward to the surface of the skin. First the area turns red. Unless treated quickly (by changing your position, for example), the pressure can damage the skin and muscles in as little as a few hours.

### Pressure ulcers are more likely to develop when:

- You continuously lie in a bed or chair;
- You rub or create friction on the skin;
- You cannot or do not move or change position;
- You lose control of your bowel or bladder;
- You do not get enough nutrients or fluids;
- You have poor circulation or fragile, thin skin;
- You have problems thinking clearly;
- You have problems feeling pressure or pain.

### How can I prevent pressure ulcers?

#### *Limit pressure*

- If you are in bed, change your position at least every one to two hours.
- If you are in a chair and can shift your own weight, do so every 15 minutes.
- If you cannot shift your own weight or change position, your caregiver should change your position at least every hour.

#### *Reduce friction*

- When moving in bed, don't pull or drag yourself across the sheets; don't push or pull with your heels.
- Avoid repetitive movements. For example, don't scratch your foot by rubbing it on the sheets.

#### *Use padding carefully*

- Avoid doughnut-shaped cushions. These can hurt the tissues under your skin.
- Avoid using several layers (such as under pads, diapers and sheets) between you and your chair or bed.

#### *Protect your skin*

- Have someone check your skin and feet often.
- Clean your skin well after using a bedpan or soiling a diaper or pad. Use protective barrier ointment if you wear a diaper or pad to prevent skin breakdown.
- Use moisturizer to prevent dry skin.
- Bathe every other day.
- Don't rub or massage the skin over the bony parts of your body.