

PRESSURE SORES: AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE



Yes, you can.®



Pressure ulcers are essentially skin damage where the skin and underlying tissue breaks down. They can range in severity and in extreme cases can cause death. With early diagnosis and the right care, many of these deaths are preventable. This guide is intended as an introduction to pressure care to help individuals and carers do everything possible to prevent pressure ulcers from forming and to teach people how to check for them so that they can be spotted at the earliest of stages. By following the advices in this booklet you can limit your risk of ever developing a pressure sore and avoid a great deal and pain and discomfort.

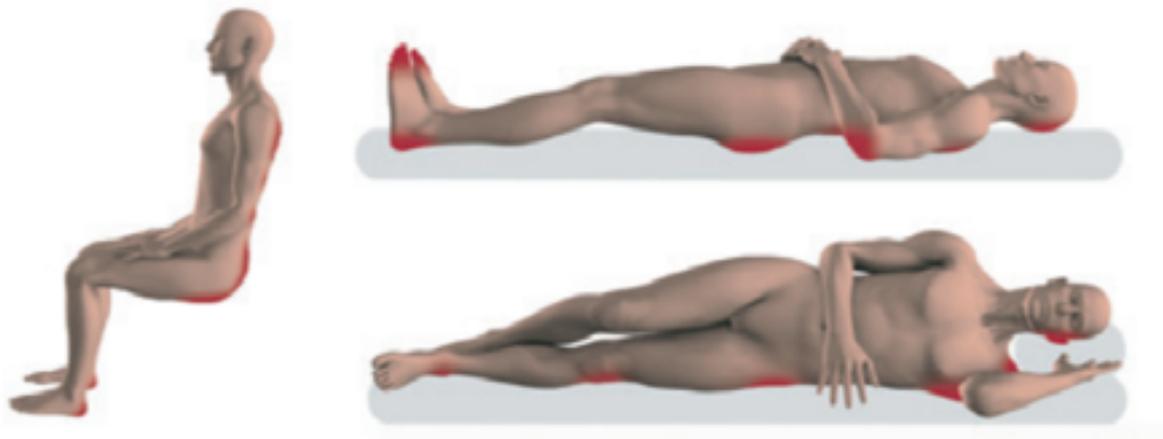
First things first: what is a pressure sore?

Let's face it, our bodies weren't originally made to sit, or lie down for an extended amount of time. Many of us who are disabled have to do this though and, when we are unable to feel certain areas of the body getting uncomfortable, or even damaged, due to pressure and friction, a pressure sore (also known as a pressure ulcer or a bed sore) can appear. Pressure sores, like most medical things, can range in severity from redness in the skin to a dangerous open wound where muscle and bone can be seen. That's why it's vital that we check our bodies regularly, especially if there are parts that we have no feeling in, just to be sure and catch these sores in time. Whilst this guide is by no means a replacement to medical advice, and we would always recommend that you see a medical professional if you think you have a pressure sore, we hope it will answer a few questions.

How pressure sores are caused

When we sit or lie down for a long period of time, pressure causes our skin to squash, therefore restricting blood flow. Oxygen can't get to the squashed skin to deliver much needed nutrients and, after some time, skin tissues become damaged due to this lack of nutrients. Many of us who do lie or sit often can also slip down a chair or bed, causing skin to get trapped and stretch. This is called shear. Skin temperature and moisture (it's microclimate) can also have an impact on the development of a pressure sore, so these are things to keep in check wherever possible.





Where they usually appear

Where are the most bony areas of your body? Your bottom? Perhaps it's the heels of your feet, your elbows, or even an area of your head. Simply put - if you put pressure on these areas by lying or sitting for a while, pressure sores could develop with time.

Checking for warning signs

A good way to check for a pressure sore is to look for redness in lighter skin, and bluish/purple patches on darker skin. Press your finger over the area for 15 seconds. If the area goes whiter, it's very unlikely to be a pressure sore. If the discolouration stays, get a second opinion from a friend or colleague and contact your doctor. Also be on the lookout for any swelling, dry patches, torn skin or blisters, hard or soft and hold or cold areas of skin; these could also be warning signs.





Reducing the risk

This guide is absolutely not meant to scare anyone. Instead, it's meant for everyone seeking extra information or advice. Those of us who have difficulty moving about, or are unable to feel certain areas of our bodies, are at a higher risk of developing pressure sores. If you've recently had surgery, have poor circulation, smoke or have a poor diet and low fluid intake, you also need to be extra vigilant when looking for sores. There are some things you can do to reduce the risk of getting one:

- ▶ Check the skin for signs of damage at least once a day if lying or sitting for long periods. If possible, stand and move around for five minutes every hour to get the blood flowing.
- ▶ Movement: make sure to turn and change position regularly and transfer your weight off bony areas of the body. Roll from side to side in bed every half an hour if you can. This removes pressure and helps the blood flow.

- ▶ Repositioning in a wheelchair is recommended every 15-30 minutes, either by rolling from side to side, leaning forward or by doing lift offs (pushing yourself up using the armrests to relieve pressure from your bottom).
- ▶ If you have to sit or lie for long periods of time, make sure you have a suitable cushion and mattress to help reduce the risk of damage.
- ▶ Eat a well balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids.
- ▶ Keep your skin clean and dry by using mild, non-drying soaps. Dry yourself carefully without rubbing too hard. If incontinence is an issue for you, wash your skin with a gentle soap immediately and pat dry.

Hopefully this guide has given you a little more information about pressure sores, including how they are created and how to best prevent them. If you are ever unsure, please do contact a healthcare professional at your earliest convenience.

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