



## What is a pressure ulcer? If you are in bed

**A pressure ulcer is an area of damaged skin and flesh. It is usually caused by sitting or lying in one position for too long without moving, or by rubbing or dragging your skin across a surface.**

A pressure ulcer may develop in only a few hours. It usually starts with the skin changing colour – it may appear slightly redder, warmer or darker than usual. If this isn't treated quickly, it can develop into a blister or open wound – and over a longer period – into a deep hole in the skin.

Pressure ulcers are most likely to develop on the parts of the body which take your weight and where the bone is close to the surface. The areas most at risk are the heels, toes, ankles, knees, hips, bottom, base of spine, elbows and shoulders.

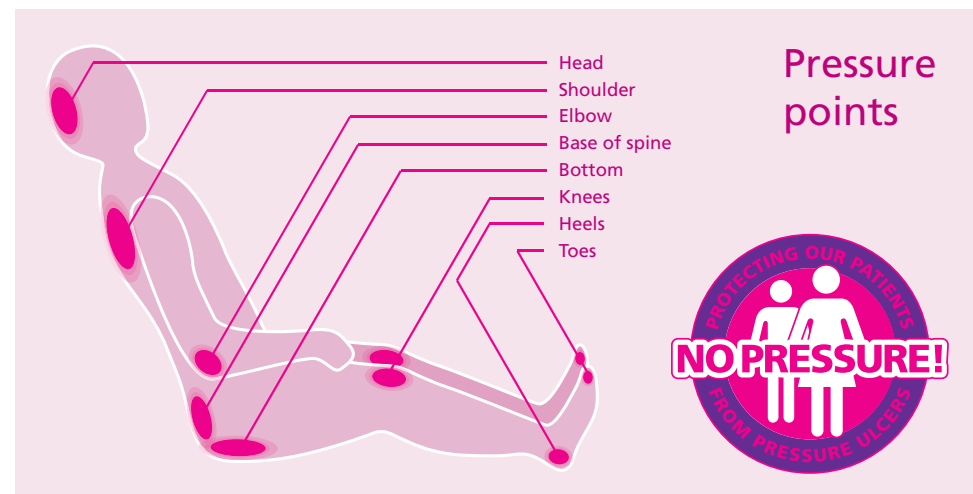
## If you are in an armchair or wheelchair

- If possible, try to take the weight off any vulnerable areas every 15 minutes or so by leaning forward and pushing up on the arms of the chair. Or you could roll from cheek to cheek for a short while.
- Ask a health professional for advice on seating and pressure relieving cushions.
- If your wheelchair has been provided by NHS wheelchair services and you are concerned contact the wheelchair centre for advice about the cushion.

- If possible change your position every two hours, alternating between your back and your sides. You may need help to do this properly so that you do not drag your skin along the sheets.
- Use pillows to stop your knees and ankles touching each other, especially when you are lying on your side.
- Using a bed cradle or light weight duvet instead of heavy blankets can relieve pressure on vulnerable areas and will make moving easier.
- Avoid sheets made of synthetic material like nylon because they are more likely to make your skin hot and sticky. Sheets should be changed often, especially if you sweat a lot.
- You might need some specialist equipment and a health professional will tell you what is suitable and how you can get it.

### Carers

If you are looking after someone who cannot change position themselves, seek advice from a health professional on how to lift and move them correctly.



## What should I do if I think I may be at risk of developing a pressure ulcer?

- Contact a health professional and ask for advice.
- Try not to drag your legs and arms when you are moving or getting up because this can damage your skin. Lifting your legs and arms means that you will not rub them.
- Avoid tight clothing and ensure that seams do not cause friction.

## Incontinence

If you experience incontinence, ask your health professional for advice.

## Skin inspection

- Check your skin for signs of damage at least once-a-day. Look for skin that does not return to its normal colour after you have taken the weight off it. For areas that are hard to see, use a mirror or ask your carer to look for you.
- Keep your skin clean and moisturised. Avoid rubbing or massaging your skin too hard – especially over the bony parts of your body. Pat your skin dry with a soft towel.
- Do not use talcum powder or perfumed soaps because it may dry out your skin. Talcum powder may make it difficult to see if the skin is redder or darker than usual.
- Ask for advice from a healthcare professional on the use of skin creams.

## What should I do if I think I have a pressure ulcer?

Talk to a health professional. Pressure ulcers are more likely to get better with treatment. Always ask for help if you think you need it.

## Eat a healthy diet

It is very important to try and eat regularly and maintain a balanced diet that includes plenty of fluids. If your skin is healthy it is less likely to be damaged.

## Use the right equipment

You can get a wide range of support equipment, including specialist mattresses, bed frames and cushions. A health professional will tell you what you need and how best to access it.

## Try not to worry

Pressure ulcers will sometimes happen even if you are doing everything you can to avoid them, so do not blame yourself.

---

## For further information or advice

If you are unsure about any of the information in this leaflet, or have further questions, please contact your local health professional, including your community nurse, GP, dietician, podiatrist, physiotherapist or occupational therapist.

You can receive help with queries about NHS services from the **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

**Tel: 0800 088 4449**

**Email: [pals@nchc.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@nchc.nhs.uk)**

---

If you would like this publication in large print, Braille, alternative format or in a different language, please contact us on 01603 697300 and we will do our best to help.



Published by Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust, September 2012.  
Reprinted January 2013.