

## Where to look

- 'bony prominences', for example on your elbows or shoulders;
- swollen skin over bony points;
- areas where skin may be damaged due to temperature changes.

If you or your carer notices possible or actual signs of damage, you should tell your healthcare staff immediately. Contact the nursing staff if you are in hospital, or your public health nurse or GP, if you are at home.

## Get advice

Your nurse or healthcare professional should tell you (and your carer if you have one) about how best to reduce pressure on areas of your body that are at risk of pressure damage. This advice should include tips on:

- the correct seating and lying positions;
- how to adjust your lying or sitting position;
- how often you need to move or be moved; and
- which equipment you should use.

Your nurse or healthcare professional should also advise you how to avoid pressure by, for example, making sure your bedding is free of creases. In addition, your clothing should not have:

- thick seams;
- zips;
- studs; or
- buttons.

Your shoes and socks should not be too tight.

## Would you like to know more?

Ask your nurse or healthcare professional or visit [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

## Information Source

NICE Patient Information Pressure Ulcers



## National Quality Improvement Programme



## How to recognise and relieve pressure ulcers

A patient information leaflet

## National Quality Improvement Programme



## What are pressure ulcers?

Pressure ulcers are also known as bedsores, pressure sores and decubitus ulcers. They are localised injuries to the skin, or the tissue underneath the skin, or both. Sitting in a chair or lying in bed puts a lot of pressure on the skin over what are called 'bony prominences'. These are areas where bones or joints may 'stick out' because there is very little flesh over them, for example your knees or elbows.

## How does 'pressure' cause harm?

Body weight squashes the tissues in those who are unable to move to relieve pressure. This reduces the blood supply to the affected areas, squashes the cells and reduces the oxygen and nutrient supply to the tissues. This pressure combined with 'shear' can cause pressure ulcers.

## What is 'shear'?

'Shear forces' or 'shear strain' occurs in soft tissue when these tissues are stretched, for example, when a person is sliding down in a chair or in bed, or when sitting down and the tissue stretches around the bones.

Shearing is a mixture of pressure and friction. Shearing is caused when two surfaces have opposing forces, for example, when someone slides over a surface, like a bed or chair.

## Where are pressure ulcers found?

Pressure ulcers usually occur over bony areas, in particular:

- shoulders;
- elbows;
- buttocks; and
- heels.

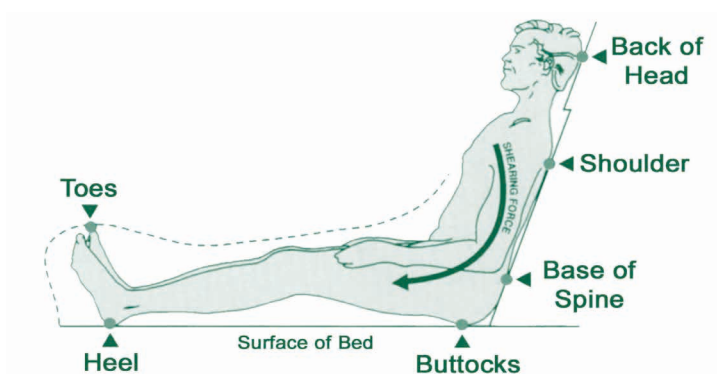
Pressure ulcers can develop in the deeper layers of the tissue and may not always result in a break in the skin.

## Who gets pressure ulcers?

Anyone who is confined to bed or a chair and is unable to move is at risk. A number of other factors increase the risk in immobile persons, for example:

- loss of sensation;
- loss of bowel or bladder control; or
- poor nutrition.

You are also at risk of getting a pressure ulcer when you are unwell and you are unable to move to change your position regularly.



*This picture identifies the areas on the body where pressure ulcers are most likely to develop.*

## What can you do to relieve pressure ulcers?

The best things you can do to relieve the pressure, whether you are lying in bed or sitting in a chair, are to:

- keep active; and
- change your position frequently.

If you are unable to move yourself, the staff in the unit, or your carers if you are at home, will help to change your position regularly. Special equipment such as air mattresses, cushions and booties may be used to reduce the pressure in particular places.

## Look after your skin

- Keep your bedding dry.
- Let staff or your carer know if your clothes or bedding are damp or creased.
- Tell staff or your carer if you have any tenderness or soreness over a bony area.
- Tell staff or your carer if you notice any reddened, blistered or broken skin.
- Avoid rubbing or massaging your skin over bony parts of the body.
- Use a mild soap.
- Moisturise dry skin.

## Eat a balanced diet

Eating a healthy nutritious diet and drinking fluids will help keep your skin healthy.

## Check your skin

If you are willing and able to do so, staff can teach you how to check your skin. Training can also be given to your carer (if you have one). You or your carer should inspect your skin regularly, looking for signs of possible or actual damage.

The signs to look for are:

- purplish or bluish patches on dark-skinned people;
- red patches on light-skinned people;
- swelling;
- blisters;
- shiny areas;
- dry patches.