

Pressure Ulcers Prevention and Treatment

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

Tissue Viability Team on 07467338848
Monday to Friday

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This leaflet is designed to provide you with information regarding pressure ulcers.

Prevention and early detection of skin changes is vital to stop the development of pressure ulcers.

Pressure ulcers can be painful, affect your quality of life and lengthen a stay in hospital. Pressure ulcers may be life threatening if they become infected.

What is a pressure ulcer?

A pressure ulcer is damage to the skin and underlying tissue.

Pressure ulcers are caused by three main things:

- **Pressure** - the weight of the body pressing down on the skin.
- **Shear** - the layers of skin slide over one another, this might happen when you slide down or are pulled up in a bed or a chair or transferring to and from your wheelchair.
- **Medical Device** - a device used for medical purposes (e.g. plaster cast, oxygen tubing, and catheters) that presses into your skin if not positioned correctly.

The first sign that a pressure ulcer might be forming is usually discoloured, painful skin. This might become worse and result in an open wound.

The common places for pressure ulcers to occur are over bony areas such as the bottom, heels, hips, elbows, ankles, shoulders, spine and back of the head.

York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is committed to preventing all avoidable pressure ulcers and to ensure our patients receive the highest quality care.

Who gets pressure ulcers?

Anyone can develop a pressure ulcer, but some people are more at risk than others. People might be at increased risk of getting a pressure ulcer if, for example, they:

- Have problems moving and cannot change position without help.
- Cannot feel pain over part or all of their body.
- Are incontinent.
- Are seriously ill or undergoing surgery.
- Have had pressure ulcers in the past.
- Have a poor diet and not drinking enough water.
- Are very old or very young.
- Have damage to the spinal cord and cannot move or feel their bottom and legs.
- Older people who may have suffered an injury such as a broken hip.

Your health care professional will assess your risk of developing a pressure ulcer when you are admitted to hospital or cared for by a community service and then on a continuing basis depending on your situation. This will involve asking some questions and looking at your skin. You may be assessed frequently if you are at risk.

Preventing pressure ulcers

Pressure ulcers can develop very quickly in some people. Damage may not just involve the skin but may be deeper. Pressure ulcers can cause pain and admission or longer stays in hospital. Deep ulcers can take months and in some cases years to heal. Pressure ulcers not only reduce the quality of life you live but can cause more admissions to hospital and even be life threatening.

To prevent pressure ulcers, it is important to do the following:

Keep moving

Moving around and changing position as much as possible reduces and relieves the pressure to vulnerable areas. If you have a pressure ulcer it is best to avoid lying or sitting on the ulcer as this will make it worse.

Your healthcare professional can advise on how best to relieve or reduce pressure. This advice should include:

- Correct lying and sitting positions.
- How to adjust your lying and sitting position.
- How often you need to move or be moved.
- Supporting your feet and offloading your heels.
- Maintaining good posture.
- Which equipment to use and how to use it.

If you have a pressure ulcer, you should be repositioned regularly to allow the ulcer to heal and prevent further damage. This applies to you whether you are in a bed, chair, or wheelchair.

Your healthcare professional should work with you to choose how is best for you to be repositioned, which is often difficult and limits your daily activities but is very important. They will also consider if your sitting time should be restricted.

Mattresses and cushions

There are different types of mattresses and cushions that can help reduce pressure over the bony parts of your body and so prevent pressure ulcers.

It is important to understand if you decline pressure relieving equipment, your pressure areas or existing ulcers may get worse causing increase likelihood of admission to hospital or even death.

Mattresses provide greater pressure relief as your pressure is more evenly distributed throughout the mattress surface. It is therefore advisable that you sleep in your bed rather than on a chair.

Your healthcare professional will work with you to advise on which equipment is most appropriate for your needs and review this on a regular basis.

Please ensure equipment is returned when you no longer require it.

Skin assessments

Your skin should be checked regularly for signs of pressure ulcer development. How often your skin is checked depends upon your level of risk. Your healthcare professional or carer should be looking for:

- Red patches of skin on light skinned people that do not go away.
- Bluish or purplish patches on dark skinned people that do not go away.
- Blisters or damage to the skin.
- Patches of hot skin.
- Swelling.
- Patches of hard skin.
- Patches of unusually hot or cool skin.
- Painful areas of skin

If you have a pressure ulcer it should be assessed at regular intervals. The ulcer will be recorded in your notes which might include taking photographs. Your healthcare professional will also categorise your pressure ulcer according to how deep it is so progress can be monitored. This will enable the most appropriate treatment to be chosen for your pressure ulcer.

Self-care

It is important that you change position as often as possible. You will be given advice on how to redistribute your weight. People with limited movement may need assistance from someone else.

You should inspect your own skin to check for signs of pressure ulcers if possible - you might use a mirror to see awkward areas such as bottoms and heels. If you notice possible damage, it is important that you let someone in the healthcare team know as soon as possible.

Perhaps if you have been unwell and sat for longer than normal, try standing (if you are able) every hour and lying on your side in bed to remove pressure. This will allow your body to recover blood flow to the affected skin.

A good diet

Eating well and drinking enough water is very important particularly for people at risk of developing a pressure ulcer. Without the proper nutrition a pressure ulcer can get worse or fail to improve. You may be referred to a dietician for specialist advice if necessary.

Pressure ulcers from medical devices or plaster casts

Advice for staff and patients

Pressure ulcers can occur when a medical device such as a catheter tube, oxygen mask or plaster cast (as a few examples) rub or press on the skin. It is important that you report any redness, discomfort, or pain to a health care professional.

Do not wait for your next appointment; the damage will only get worse.

Pressure ulcers are painful, and you can get an infection if the skin is broken. This can cause serious complications in your recovery, especially if you are diabetic.

To help prevent getting pressure ulcers:

- Change position regularly.
- Raise swollen legs or arms on a stool or cushion making sure all bony areas are free from pressure.
- Keep your skin well moisturised.
- Report any concerns with your medical device or plaster cast as soon as possible.

Please contact your local plaster room as soon as possible or inform a member of staff if you notice this at an appointment or while you are in hospital.

Pressure Ulcers to Heels

In the majority of cases heel pressure damage can be prevented. One of the best ways to relieve pressure on the heels is by moving around and changing position frequently.

During your stay in hospital and if you have a Community team, your heels will be inspected regularly. This means it may be possible for us to pick up problems that you are not aware of and act promptly to address them. If damage is identified early, we can generally prevent it from getting worse.



You may be assessed as needing extra equipment to prevent heel pressure damage or to prevent any existing skin damage getting worse. These may include adding a pump to your mattress, the use of pillows to lift your heels completely off the mattress, gel pads, casted heel cups or foam protectors.

How can I help myself?

Here are some useful hints and tips to help you avoid heel pressure damage:

Do:

- ✓ Keep moving. Change position regularly while in bed and if you can, stand and take a few steps every 15-30 minutes.
- ✓ Use the equipment as advised by your nurse or podiatrist.
- ✓ When in bed use a pillow under the backs of your legs to lift your heels off the mattress, as in the photo below.
- ✓ Have your feet flat on the ground when sat out in your chair or hanging over the end of a foot stool if elevated.
- ✓ Ask for the bed end to be extended if you regularly slip down the bed causing your feet to press against the hard bed end.



- ✓ Try to eat a healthy, balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids.

Don't:

- ❖ Massage or rub pressure areas.
- ❖ Use your heel to push yourself up the bed.
- ❖ Cushion your heels on a sheepskin or on top of a pillow.
- ❖ Don't tuck blankets in too tightly.

If you're concerned that you have not had your heels checked, or that you may have or are developing any pressure damage, you should inform a member of your healthcare team immediately.

Treating pressure ulcers

Your health care professional should assess your pressure ulcer regularly whether you are in hospital or at home to check for any changes.

To relieve the pressure your healthcare professional should work with you to find the best ways of moving around and the most suitable cushions and mattresses.

Your pressure ulcer may require other treatments to help it heal; these may include dressings and referrals to other health professionals. If there are signs of infection your healthcare professional may treat with antibiotics or dressings that kill bacteria to help the wound heal.

Your care should be patient centred, evidence based and planned together to maintain compliance with the recommended prevention or treatment. This will help us to make any necessary amendments if something is not suitable. This could include a change of routine or equipment that you could manage.

Contact details:

If you have any concerns regarding your skin, including new soreness that isn't going away, discolouration, hardness, or new broken skin over a bone or under a device, please contact the numbers below.

Community settings:

York and Selby

SPA (Single Point of Access) on 01904 721200.

Scarborough, Whitby, Ryedale & Pocklington

SPOC (Single Point of Contact) on 01653 609609

Bridlington & Driffield

SPA (Single Point of Access) on 01482 247111

Inpatient settings:

Please inform the nurse looking after you.

If you have any concerns regarding a mattress or cushion that has been provided for you at home or no longer need it, please contact:

Medequip on 01423 226240

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please speak to ward staff.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website:

www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/

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