



York Teaching Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

Pressure Ulcers

Prevention and Treatment

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact
Tissue Viability Team on 01653 604549
Monday to Friday

Malton Community Hospital
Middlecave Road
Malton, YO17 7NG

Caring with pride

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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, lengthen a stay in hospital and may even be life threatening.

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 (such as plaster cast, oxygen tubing as a few examples) that presses into the skin surface for a prolonged period of time.

The first sign that a pressure ulcer might be forming is usually discoloured 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 Teaching Hospital 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 seen by a community nurse and then on a continuing basis depending on your situation. This will involve asking some questions and looking at your skin. You may not be assessed frequently if you are not 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 a long time to heal. In some cases pressure ulcers can become life threatening.

In order 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 is able to 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.
- Keeping 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 more 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. 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 heal much slower or could get worse.

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 assessment

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 don't go away.
- Bluish/purplish patches on dark skinned people that don't go away.
- Blisters or damage to the skin.
- Patches of hot skin.
- Swelling.
- Patches of hard skin.
- Patches of cool 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 or tracings. Your healthcare professional will also grade 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.

Please think about what may have been the cause of the skin changes and remove that cause if possible until you can discuss the issue. For example a pair of shoes that may be rubbing the skin. 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

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/ 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.

Treating pressure ulcers

Your health care professional should assess your pressure ulcer regularly according to whether you are in hospital or at home and 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.

If you decide not to accept advice or equipment, your skin condition may deteriorate.

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.

If you have any equipment provided by a Community Equipment Loan Store, and you no longer need it, please phone 01423 554602 to arrange for it to be collected.

Where to find further information

If you require further information regarding pressure ulcer prevention and treatment please ask your doctor, nurse or any other member of your healthcare team.

The Tissue Viability Team are available to offer advice and can be contacted Monday to Friday. Our telephone number and address is on the front of this leaflet.

NHS Direct is also a good resource for finding out more about pressure ulcers. You can call NHS Direct on 111 or visit the website www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

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 contact the Tissue Viability Team, Malton Community Hospital, Middlecave Road, Malton, YO17 7NG or telephone us on 01653 604549.

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 pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

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01904 725566

email: access@york.nhs.uk



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