

## PREVENTING PRESSURE ULCERS IN THE HOSPITAL

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*“Go ahead and roll your shoulders onto the bed.”*

If you are at an increased risk of developing pressure ulcers, there are steps you can take to prevent tissue damage. Your healthcare provider will check your skin each day for signs of redness and damage.

You and your caregivers can take an active role, too. Light skin may look red or discolored. Dark skin may look purplish. The skin may be painful, warm or cold compared to surrounding skin, or firm or soft compared to surrounding skin.

To prevent pressure ulcers and the complications that can come with them, reduce constant pressure on your skin and underlying tissue. Movement is key.

*“And what you can do to help is keep changing your position frequently. Even though you’re not getting up a whole lot right now, if you roll from side to side and kind of shift your body weight from one bottom cheek to the other, it will help with that pressure.”*

Change positions often, at least every two hours. If you need help repositioning, your healthcare provider or caregiver can help you reposition often.

There may also be tools you can use to help you move. Talk to your healthcare provider about safe options for you.

Because bony areas of your body can easily push on your skin and add pressure, protect these areas. Use protectors or cushions, and lie in a position that takes the pressure off areas like your heels, and elbows.

Sitting up too far in bed can put your tailbone and base of your spine at risk. In this position, your bones move down, but your skin can get trapped, creating a pressure ulcer. To protect your lower back, do not raise the head of your bed more than 30 degrees.

Make sure your bed linens are changed on a regular basis and that your bed is kept wrinkle-free. And make sure you wear loose-fitting, comfortable clothing that does not pinch or rub your skin causing irritation or damage.

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In addition to avoiding pressure on your skin, take steps to protect healthy skin. Make sure your skin is properly cleaned with warm, soapy water and patted dry. Do not leave your skin wet or soiled for any period of time. Wet or soiled skin can break down more easily, and lead to pressure ulcers and infection.

If incontinence is a concern, use pads that absorb moisture and pull it away from your skin, instead of adult diapers that can trap moisture. Your healthcare provider may also recommend lotions, creams or powders that act as a moisture block to protect your skin from wetness.

Other lotions and powders can help protect the skin by adding moisture. Dry skin can crack easily. Older skin is usually thin and fragile and loses its elasticity. All increase your risk of developing a pressure ulcer.

Don't forget to help keep your skin and tissues healthy from the inside, too. Drink plenty of fluids, especially water, to keep your skin soft and healthy.

Your healthcare provider may recommend you increase amounts of certain vitamins and nutrients you take, like vitamin C or zinc, to promote healthy healing. Adding foods that are high in protein can also help prevent pressure ulcers and at the same time help healing.

And if you smoke, quit. Smoking damages the blood vessels needed to deliver oxygen and nutrients to all your organs, including your skin. Without oxygen, your skin can dry out and is more at risk for damage. Smoking is bad for your overall health. Talk to your healthcare provider about ways to quit, and quit today.

An unexpected complication like a pressure ulcer can be painful and put your overall health at risk. Take steps to prevent a pressure ulcer and keep your skin healthy.