

PRESSURE ULCER: INTRODUCTION TO TREATMENT

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Preventing pressure ulcers before they develop is the best way to protect your overall skin health. But, despite your best efforts, you may still develop a pressure ulcer.

If you do think you have a pressure ulcer, tell your healthcare provider right away. Quick treatment of a damaged area can prevent a minor irritation from progressing to severe damage that can be painful and slow to heal.

Your healthcare provider will check the area for signs of damage. He will look at the size and depth of the sore, check for bleeding and fluid in the area, look at the surrounding tissue to see if the damage is spreading and check for any signs of infection.

Based on all of these factors and your overall health, your healthcare provider can begin treatment. The first step in treatment is to take pressure off the damaged area in order to restore blood flow and increase the amount of oxygen getting to the skin and tissue.

If the skin is not broken, the area can be washed with soap and water on a regular basis. Remember to pat the area dry. Do not rub it.

If the skin is broken, it can be cleaned with a saline solution and covered with a dressing. The dressing keeps the wound moist while keeping the surrounding tissues dry, and protects the ulcer from infection. Your healthcare provider will tell you how often to clean the wound and change the dressing.

Open wounds, such as pressure ulcers, are easy places for infection to start. You and your healthcare provider can watch for signs of infection. If you notice redness or warmth at the site, red streaks leading away from the wound, tenderness around the wound, pus in the wound, a foul odor, or a fever, tell your healthcare provider right away.

Your healthcare provider may prescribe antibiotics to fight an infection. Take these medications exactly as prescribed and make sure you finish the entire prescription, whether you feel better or not.

If your pressure ulcer is causing you pain, discuss your pain management options with your healthcare provider. Anti-inflammatories, like Advil[®], Aleve[®] or Motrin[®] can reduce pain, especially before or after any treatments or dressing changes. Topical creams can also reduce pain at the wound site and can provide much needed relief quickly.

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Severe pressure ulcers can take time to heal. Throughout healing, your healthcare provider will closely watch the area. If a pressure ulcer is not healing as quickly as it should, surgery to close the wound may be an option.

At any point during treatment, your healthcare provider may decide to test the tissue to look for infection or other complications. You may have a blood test done, or a tissue sample may be taken and sent to a lab.

As your pressure ulcer heals, be patient. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions, take all your medications as prescribed and do all you can to promote healing.