

# What is a Pressure Injury?

Maintaining your overall health includes maintaining healthy skin. But if you are lying or sitting for long periods of time, like when you are in the hospital, skin can break down and become injured. This is called a pressure injury.

Your skin is the largest organ of your body. And just like every other organ in your body, your skin needs oxygen and nutrients, from your bloodstream, to stay healthy.

If something gets in the way of that oxygen delivery, like pressure, your skin and tissue can become damaged.

Bony areas of the body, like your heels, ankles, tailbone, elbows, and back of the head are usually most at risk for damage. These areas are called pressure points because there is little to cushion the skin from the bone.

Tubes and other medical devices like masks and tape can also put pressure on areas of the body like your ears and neck.

This constant pressure blocks the blood from getting to the skin and causes tissue damage.

What can start out as a small, red, irritated area, with only slight damage, can quickly develop into a larger wound area that affects muscle tissue and bone.

These wounds may cause pain, be very slow to heal and lead to serious infections.

If bacteria or germs enter your body through a pressure injury, the bacteria can infect your blood and spread to your organs, causing a serious complication called 'sepsis'.

These complications can slow your recovery and lengthen your hospital stay.

To prevent these complications, your healthcare team will use a scale called the Braden scale to check your risk for developing pressure injuries.

You are at an increased risk of developing pressure injuries if you: are elderly; have health problems that affect blood circulation, including diabetes; are unable to easily move part of your body; have reduced feeling, or no feeling, in parts of your body; or are in a bed or chair for long periods of time.

If your healthcare provider does decide you are at a greater risk for developing pressure injuries, a prevention plan will become part of your overall care.

Pressure injuries can take a long time to heal. Do not wait to treat a painful wound. Instead, take steps to prevent pressure injuries and keep your skin healthy.