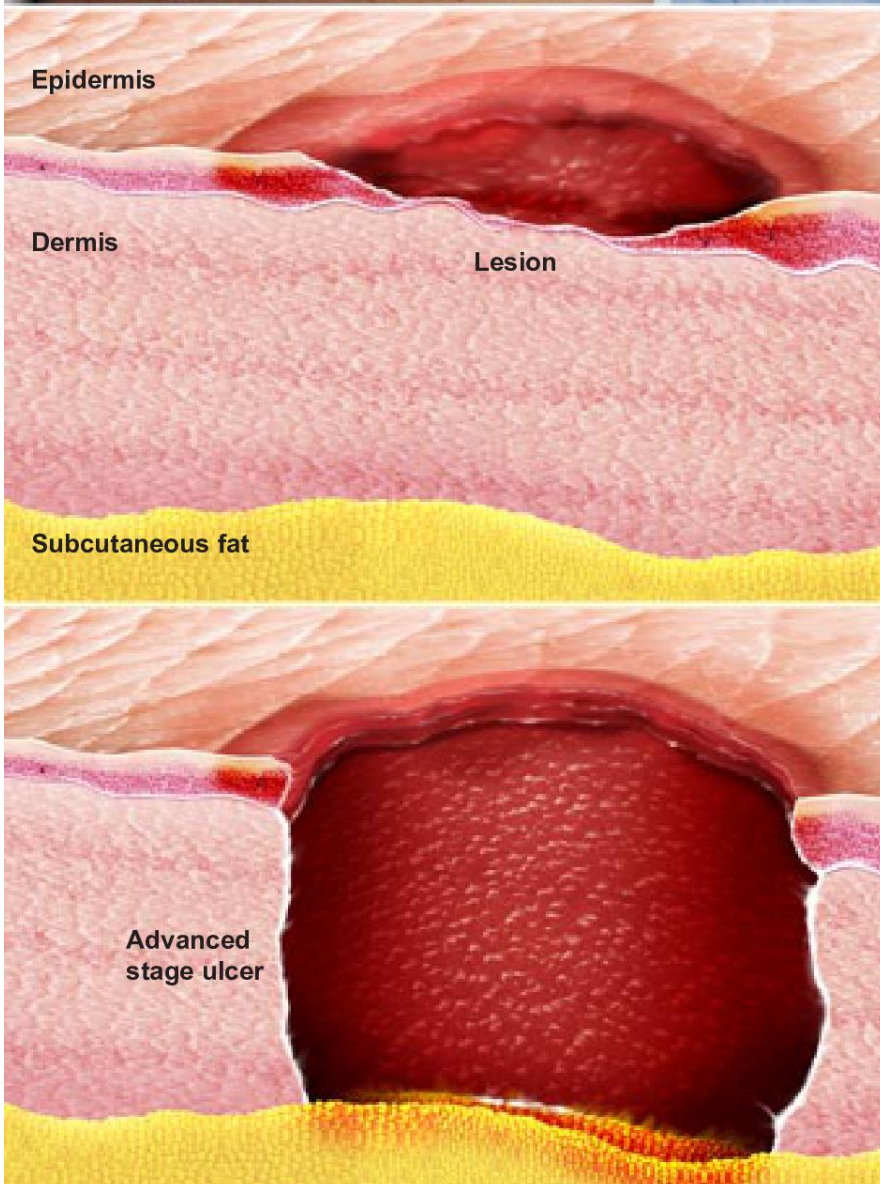




Pressure Ulcers



Overview

This injury, also called a pressure sore or bedsore, starts as an area of discoloration on the skin's surface. It can progress to form a lesion. Without proper care, a pressure ulcer can rapidly lead to a severe infection deep within the body.

Causes

People who sit or lie down for long periods without moving are at risk of getting pressure ulcers. They can be a problem for people who use wheelchairs, and for people who are hospitalized. Pressure ulcers tend to form on the bonier parts of the body. The heels, buttocks, hips, elbows and shoulders are at high risk. So are the ears and the back of the head.

How They Form

Pressure ulcers are caused by constant pressure against the skin. They can also be caused by friction, and by a force called "shear." Shear can occur when a patient's hospital bed is elevated. The skin stays in place against the bed, but tissues and bones beneath the skin slide downward. This prevents blood from circulating to the skin properly.

Complications

Pressure ulcers can cause severe complications. They can cause infections in the soft tissues, bones and joints. They can allow bacteria to invade the circulatory system, a condition called sepsis. They can cause cellulitis, a painful skin infection. And they can lead to cancer of the skin.

Prevention and Treatment

Pressure ulcers can be difficult to treat, so prevention is key. Preventative steps include frequent repositioning, proper skin care, and proper nutrition and hydration. After a pressure ulcer forms, treatment depends on its severity. In the early stages, it can be treated with wound care and with frequent repositioning. In advanced stages, a doctor may need to trim away dead tissue. Surgery may be needed to remove infection and to close the wound.