

Preventing Pressure Injuries

What is a pressure injury?

A pressure injury is an area of damaged skin and flesh caused by staying in one position for too long (eg prolonged sitting or lying).

Or if you are sitting up in bed, sliding down can injure your bottom or heels.

Pressure injuries are also sometimes known as bed sores, pressure sores, pressure areas, or pressure ulcers.

They can develop in a matter of hours and usually begin with the skin changing colour.

Pain or discomfort may occur.

The first sign of a pressure injury can be a discoloured area that does **not** turn white when pressed.

If the pressure is not relieved regularly, skin can be damaged ranging from a blister to a deep open wound.

Are you at risk of getting a pressure injury?

You are at risk if:

- You spend long periods of time in bed
- You are in a wheelchair or you sit for long periods of time in a chair
- You have difficulty moving about
- You have a serious illness or had major surgery
- You are elderly or frail
- You have damp skin from sweating or incontinence (eg difficulty getting to the toilet in time, loss of bladder or bowel control)
- You have loss of feeling (eg due to epidural, diabetes or following a stroke) or poor blood flow
- You do not eat a balanced diet or have enough fluids to drink

Despite the risk, pressure injuries can be avoided.

Which parts of your body are most vulnerable?

Pressure injuries develop on parts of the body that take your weight and where the bone is close to the surface eg elbow; buttock; hip; knee; toes; heel

If any of these parts start to hurt, tell your carers.

Pressure injuries can sometimes occur even if everything is being done to prevent them.

What can you and your family/whānau do to help prevent pressure injuries?

If you are in bed

- Change your position every two to three hours, moving between your back and sides
- Use pillows to stop knees and ankles from touching each other, particularly when you are lying on your side
- Try to avoid creases in the bed linen
- If sitting up in bed, be aware that sliding down the bed can cause a pressure injury to your bottom and heels
- Ask for assistance if required

If you are in a wheelchair

- Relieve pressure by leaning forward, or leaning side to side for a few minutes every half hour

What else can you do to help?

- Eat a healthy diet and drink plenty of fluids
- Keep your skin clean and dry
- Ask your nurse to help with any incontinence

Your Nurse, Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist, Doctor or Dietitian can help you plan your care to prevent a pressure injury.

Remind your carers:

PLEASE HELP ME MOVE

Source: Pamphlet produced by NZ Wound Care Society; Ministry of Health; Health Quality and Safety Commission New Zealand and ACC and adapted from originals developed by Counties Manukau Health and ADHB