

# Preventing pressure injuries

Pressure injuries are also called bed sores or pressure ulcers.

They can happen very quickly if you are unwell or not able to move easily. Any form of pressure or friction (even rubbing) can cause skin damage, particularly if your skin is moist or if you suffer from poor circulation or poor sensation in your skin.

## What you can do to protect your skin

- > If you have any skin pain or burning feeling, tell a member of your health care team.
- > Change your position every half hour.
- > Keep active– move as much as you can.
- > Eat a variety of foods from each of the five food groups every day. Drink plenty of fluid.
- > Avoid smoking – this reduces blood flow to the skin. Ask your nurse about how you can get help to quit.
- > Avoid firm massage, especially over bony areas.

## Caring for your skin

- > Use a mild cleanser, and dry your skin gently.
- > Use moisturisers if your skin is dry, flaky or cracks easily.
- > Use barrier creams between skin folds.
- > Use warm but not hot water in baths and showers.

## When you are in bed:

- > Change position every half an hour.
- > Lie on your side to relieve the pressure on your bottom and heels.
- > Avoid wrinkled, damp clothes and bedding.
- > Sliding down the bed can put pressure on heels, bottom or elbows. To avoid this, bend your knees up or raise the foot of the bed. Only have the head of the bed up high for mealtimes, if you can't sit out of bed to eat.

### Why is it important to prevent pressure injuries?

- > They are painful and can take a long time to heal
- > They can become infected, making you very sick
- > They can leave scars on your skin

## When you are sitting in a chair:

- > Change position at least every 30 minutes. If you can, stand up and walk around.
- > If you can't stand, lean forward or side-to-side (left and right) in your chair for 2 minutes to take the pressure off your bottom and hips.
- > Avoid slumping or sliding forward in the chair.
- > If needed, your health care team may be able to provide a special cushion.

## Check your skin twice a day – you can ask for help with this.



**Look for:** red areas; blistered or bruised-looking areas; shiny areas; warm or hard patches; or broken or cracked skin.

**Look at:** your whole body, but particularly bony areas such as heels, bottom and elbows; between skin folds; and under plaster, dressings, splints or tubes.

This is a picture of the early stage of a pressure injury on a heel. It is a red mark, that doesn't fade in a few minutes.

### What your health care team can do

The Nurses and Doctors will check your skin regularly for any sore or red areas. It is best if they look at your skin.

Dietitians, Podiatrists, Occupational Therapists and Physiotherapists can also provide advice, equipment and assistance.

Together, you can plan what needs to be done to protect your skin from pressure injuries.

### For more information

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This document has been reviewed and endorsed by CACAC\* for consumers and the community November 2013.

\*The South Australian Safety and Quality in Health Care Consumer and Community Advisory Committee.



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