

This leaflet is written for patients by patients and is based on experience and medical information.

How to prevent a pressure sore (also known as pressure ulcers and bed sores)

Pressure sores can nearly always be prevented. Pressure sores are painful, hard to heal, and can be fatal
Prevention is better than cure.

Have you ever sat or laid still for too long and felt uncomfortable?

What if you were unwell and unable to stand up or move position?

Something as simple as this could become the start of a pressure sore.

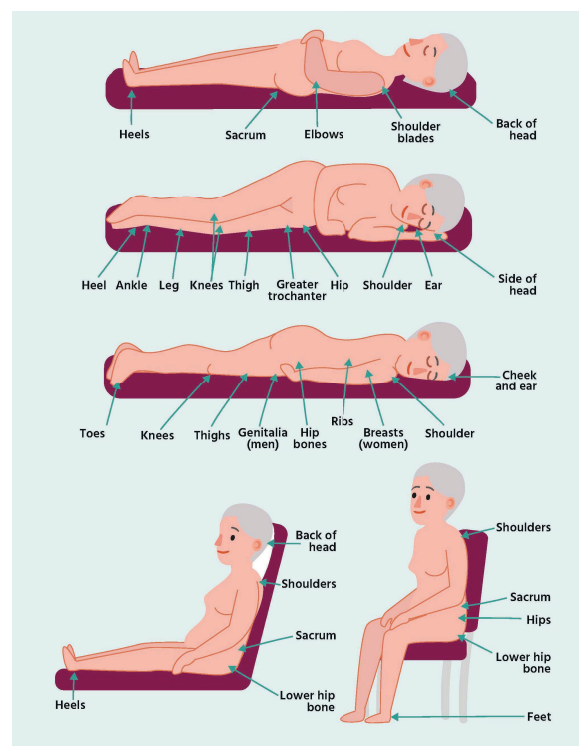
What is a pressure sore?

Pressure sores are caused by excess pressure on the skin which stops blood and oxygen reaching the skin. This causes a wound to develop. Moisture, friction (including rubbing) and shearing (when skin is moved against a fixed surface) increase the risk of developing a pressure sore.

A pressure sore can start as a painful inflamed area and develop into a large deep wound down to the underlying bone.

Pressure ulcers often occur from sitting or lying too long in one position, but they can also develop under medical devices such as masks, plaster of Paris casts and naso-gastric tubes.

Pressure damage can occur quickly, within a few hours. If you are concerned about an area of your skin either because of a change in colour, pain at the area or you notice the skin is blistered or broken, contact your health care professional to seek advice. A change in colour may look different on different skin tones.



What people say

“ Even when aware of the risk, having had a pressure sore before, and knowing my body best, it felt hard to advocate for myself with hospital staff. ”

#stopthepressure

“ I wish I'd have known about this and could have prevented it. ”

#easethepressure

You are at higher risk of pressure sores if you...

- Are unable to move some or all of your body (e.g. paralysis, following stroke or spinal cord injury or MS and Parkinson's disease).
- Are spending more time in bed or sitting down due to poor health or following illness or surgery.
- Have medical conditions that affect your blood supply (such as diabetes, kidney failure and heart failure).
- Are over 70.
- Are unable to feel pain or discomfort.
- Are dehydrated.
- Have a poor diet.
- Are very overweight or very thin.
- Have urinary and/or bowel incontinence.

It can take years for a pressure sore to heal!

Even when a wound heals, the skin is not the same as before.

You can help prevent a pressure sore by:

- Regularly changing your position, by yourself or with help from a relative or health or care professional.
- If you are needing to use a medical device (such as an oxygen mask) regularly check under the device where it comes into contact with the skin.
- Keeping your skin clean, dry and moisturised.
- Checking your skin daily for early signs and symptoms, by yourself or with help from a relative or health or care professional.
- Using the pressure relieving devices such as cushions, mattresses and off-loading devices for heels / feet provided by your health and care professionals.
- Using the repositioning devices, such as hoists and transfer boards provided by your health and care professionals, to help you change position without damaging your skin.
- Eating a healthy, balanced diet and drinking plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.
- Stopping smoking, as this can affect blood circulation.

Where to get further information and support:

- Your GP and / or community nursing team.
- Tissue Viability Nurses.
- NHS Website: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pressure-sores>
- National Wound Care Strategy Programme website: <https://www.nationalwoundcarestrategy.net>
- Pressure Ulcers: Applying All our Health (guidance): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pressure-ulcers-applying-all-our-health/pressure-ulcers-applying-all-our-health>

