PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Preventing Pressure Injuries

This information will explain how you can prevent pressure injuries.

About Pressure Injuries

A pressure injury is an area of damage to the skin or tissue underneath it. They’re sometimes called bedsores or pressure sores.

Pressure injuries commonly happen over bony areas such as your tailbone, hip, or heel of your foot.

They can also be caused by medical devices that rub against your skin such as, braces, splints, and tubing.

The first sign that a pressure injury is forming is usually skin that turns red or purple, which may get worse, and then it can turn into an open wound. They can look like a red patch of skin or like an open wound or ulcer. Pressure injuries are sometimes painful.

Risk Factors for Pressure Injuries

You may be at risk of getting a pressure injury if you:

- Currently have a pressure injury or have had one in the past.
- Lay in bed or sitting on a chair for long periods of time.
- Have trouble moving some parts of your body or trouble changing positions often.
- Are very ill or are having surgery.
- Have conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and nerve or muscle disorders that may reduce the amount of pain or discomfort you feel.
- Often don’t feel hungry, have a poor diet, or don’t drink enough fluids.
• Have weak skin, skin that breaks easily, or broken skin.
• Use medical devices that touch your skin, such as feeding tubes, oxygen delivery devices, orthopedic devices, or support stockings.
• Have increased skin moisture from incontinence (urinary or bowel leakage), sweating, or having a fever.

Ways to Prevent Pressure Injuries

Move around

• One of the best ways to prevent pressure injuries is to reduce pressure on certain areas of your body by moving around and changing your position as often as you can. When you’re sitting or lying down, make sure to move around and change your position often. Even small changes can help.
  ○ If you’re changing positions in a bed or chair, lift your buttocks; don’t drag your body.
  ○ If you’re staying in bed, change your position at least every 2 to 4 hours. Try not to lie on the bony areas of your body. Ask your family, doctors, nurses, and nursing staff to help you change your position, if needed.
  ○ If you can, try to get up and walk around.

• Raise the head of your bed as little as possible unless your medical condition makes it unsafe for you to lie flat. This will put less pressure on your buttocks

• Use pillows between your knees and ankles to keep them from touching. Also, place a pillow under your lower legs to keep your heels elevated and off the bed.

• If you’re in a wheelchair or must sit in a chair for long periods of time, change your position often. Don’t sit on doughnut-shaped pillows. Sit on a pressure relief cushion instead. If you need suggestions about a type of pillow, talk with your doctor or nurse.

• Keep your sheets clean, dry, and wrinkle-free.
Take care of your skin

- After showering or bathing, put moisturizer or lotion on your skin.
- If you’re incontinent, clean your genital area as soon as you can, then apply a skin barrier ointment or cream to protect your skin.
- Don’t rub or massage the bony parts of your skin if they’re red. This can hurt your skin and the tissues under it.
- Check your skin at least twice a day for any signs of a pressure injury. If you have any medical equipment, remove it and check the skin underneath it at least twice a day. Ask your family, doctors, or nurses to help you check your skin if needed. Tell your doctor or nurse if you feel any pain or see areas that are:
  - Red
  - Cut or open
  - Blistered
- Eat a well-balanced diet and drink plenty of liquids. If you’re on a restricted diet, talk with a clinical dietitian nutritionist for suggestions. You need a diet with enough calories, protein, fluids, vitamins, and minerals for your skin to stay healthy.

Tell your doctor or nurse if you’re concerned about the health of your skin. They will work with you and give you more suggestions to help prevent pressure injuries.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.