



Patient Guide

Protecting Your Skin *An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure (proverb)*

Ways to Prevent Pressure Ulcers

Vitalité Zone: 1B 4 5 6

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Facts about the skin

- Skin is the most important and largest organ in the body.
- It protects the body from the environment and from infections. Keeping your skin healthy and intact is very important.

What is a pressure ulcer?

A pressure ulcer is damage to the skin caused by continuous pressure over a certain period of time.

A pressure ulcer can develop in only a few hours. It usually begins with changes in the colour of the skin, which may look slightly redder or darker than usual, and these changes linger after the pressure is relieved. Pressure ulcers are sometimes called “bed sores.”

When can I get pressure ulcers?

- Have to stay in bed;
- Cannot move about easily;
- Spend long periods in an armchair or wheelchair;
- Are unable to feel discomfort because of decreased ability to feel pressure (e.g. after a stroke);
- Have a serious illness;
- Are elderly and weak;
- Have poor circulation;
- Have skin in contact with moisture (e.g. sweat or urine);
- Have a poor diet or are not drinking enough fluids.

Checking your skin

Check your skin every day at pressure points (see page 2) and have someone help you if necessary. Look out for and tell your caregiver or doctor if you find any of the following at pressure points:

- Red areas if you are light skinned, or purplish or bluish areas if you are dark skinned;
- Swelling, especially over bony areas;
- Blisters;
- Dry patches or hard areas;
- Cracks, calluses, or broken skin.

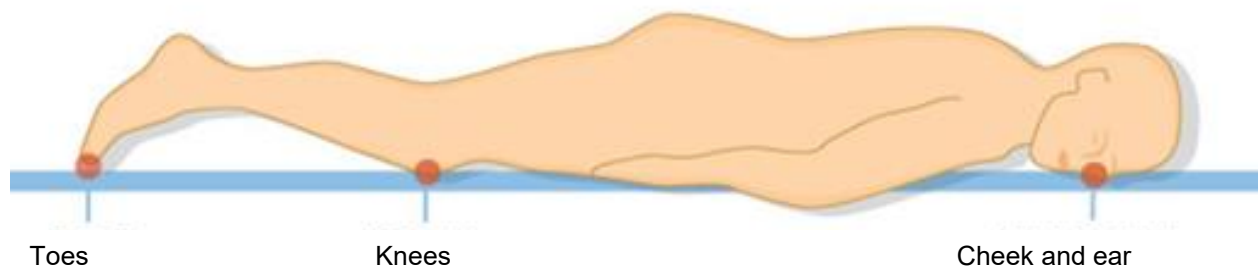
Where can I get pressure ulcers?

Pressure ulcers develop where bones are closest to the skin (e.g. hips, ankles, heels, and elbows).

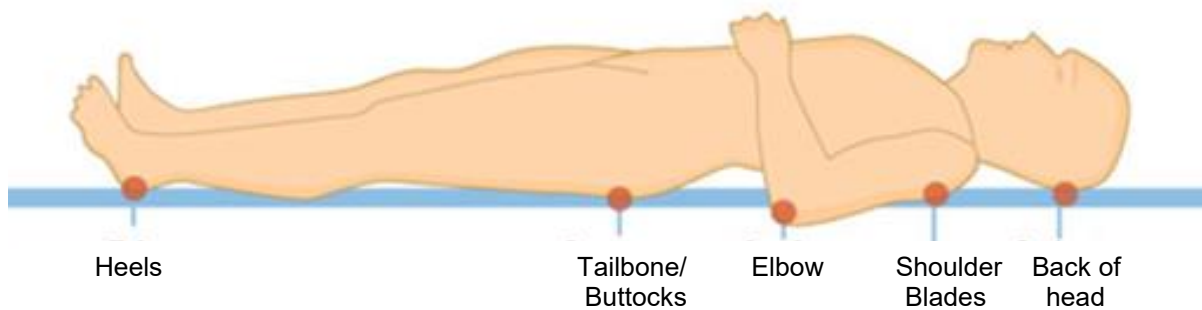
Common locations of pressure ulcers include the following:

- Back of head;
- Shoulder blade;
- Lower back;
- Elbow;
- Ear;
- Shoulder;
- Hip;
- Between knees and ankles;
- Tailbone;
- Heel;
- Buttocks.

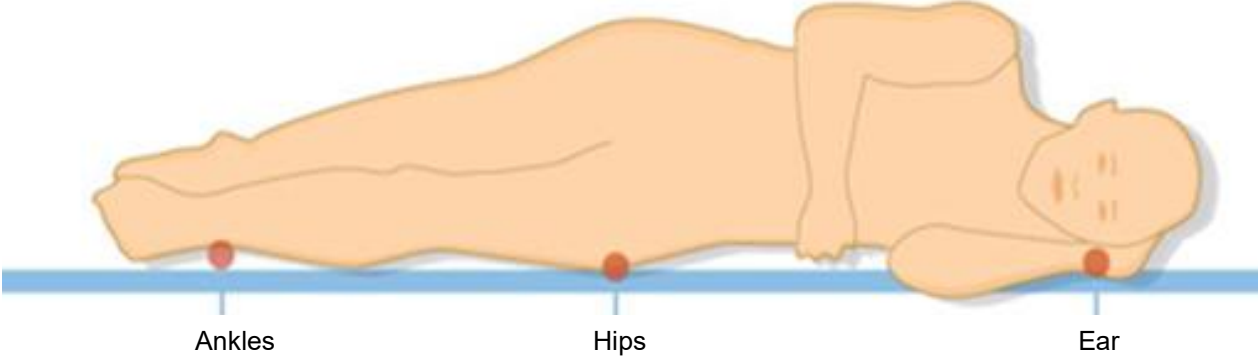
Lying face down



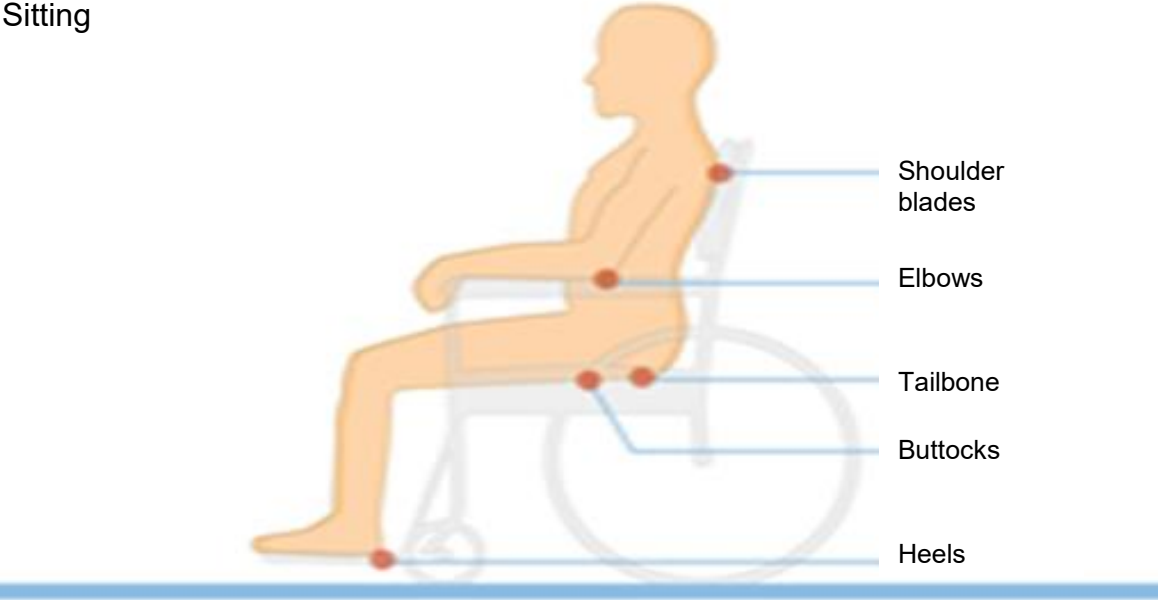
Lying on back



Lying on side

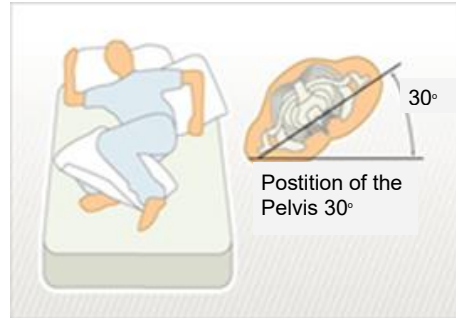


Sitting



Ways to prevent pressure ulcers

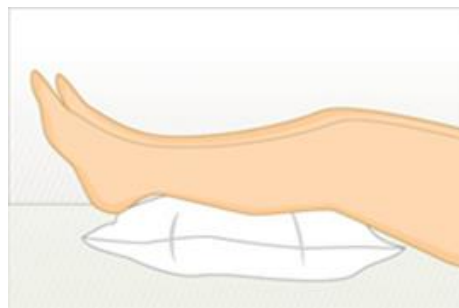
- Change position frequently when you are in a chair (lift buttocks by using arms, lean forward, or move from side to side). Do this for a few seconds to relieve the pressure every 15 minutes.
- Use cushions that reduce the pressure on the skin. Do not use doughnut-type devices as these can cut off the blood supply to the skin.



- When in bed, turn every two hours (have people help you if necessary).
- Use a foam overlay on your bed (must be at least 7-10 cm (3-4 inches) thick).
- Use foam wedges or pillows to maintain your position and to separate your knees and ankles.

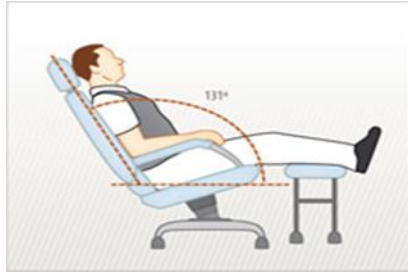


- Put pillows under your legs to prevent your heels from rubbing on the mattress and to support your knees.



- Do not drag your body when moving from chair to bed or from bed to chair or to reposition yourself higher up in bed.

- Raise the foot of the bed when sitting in bed to avoid sliding down, as this may harm your heels or buttocks; limit this position to 30 minutes.
- Use good posture when sitting and always use the special cushion chosen for you by your occupational therapist.



- Avoid rubbing your heels and elbows on the sheets.
- Do not rub the skin over bony areas of your body.
- Use moisturizers for dry skin.
- Urine and feces next to the skin increase the chance of breakdown. Follow a regular bowel and bladder schedule.
- Use mild soap and water and a soft cloth for cleansing your skin.
- Sometimes pressure ulcers can happen even when you have done everything right.
- Pressure ulcers can be treated and cured when you follow the directions given by your health care team.

Nutrition

- It is important to have a well-balanced diet by following Canada's Food Guide.
- Oral nutritional supplements may be needed if you are not eating well.
- Follow the guidelines given by your dietitian.
- Your doctor or dietitian may suggest a protein, vitamin, or mineral supplement.

Fluid intake

Drink plenty of fluids. Unless otherwise advised by your doctor, the recommended daily fluid intake for adults is 1500 mL to 2000 mL (6-8 glasses).

References

Ayello E, Braden B. "How and why to do pressure ulcer risk assessment." *Advances in Skin and Wound Care*, 2002; 15(3):125-133.

Clinical Practice Guidelines Pressure Ulcer Risk Assessment and Prevention. Royal College of Nursing, 2003; 17-19.

European Pressure Ulcer Advisor Panel and National Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel. *Prevention and Treatment of Pressure Ulcers: Quick Reference Guide*. Washington DC: National Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel; 2014.

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (2005). *Risk Assessment and Prevention of Pressure Ulcers*. (Revised 2010). Toronto, Canada: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.