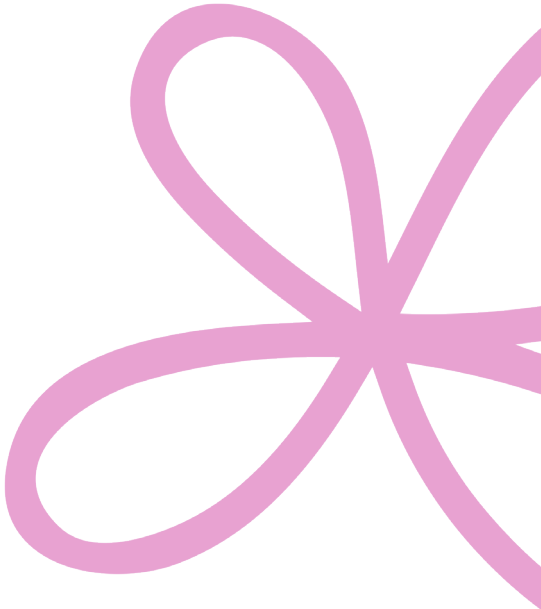




BIRMINGHAM
ST MARY'S
HOSPICE

PRESSURE ULCER PREVENTION

Guide for patients
and carers



What are pressure ulcers?

They are also known as pressure sores or bed sores. Pressure ulcers are areas of damage to the skin and underlying tissue. They range from superficial red patches through to large open wounds.

They may cause pain, or become infected. In extreme cases they cause underlying damage to muscle or bone.

What causes pressure ulcers?

They are caused by a combination of:

Pressure: when pressure is applied to skin and underlying tissues it can cause damage. Constant pressure can stop blood flow to the skin and underlying tissues. This can stop skin getting enough oxygen and nutrients to stay healthy.

Shearing: when two surfaces move in opposite directions e.g. this can happen to your skin when you slide down or are moved in bed

Friction: can happen when skin is rubbed against clothes or bedding

Common body sites for pressure ulcers

These are usually over bony prominences, so areas to monitor are:

- Base of spine
- Back of the head
- Buttocks
- Ears
- Elbows
- Hips
- Toes
- Shoulders
- Heels

What does pressure damage look like?

- Purplish/bluish patches on darker skins or red patches on light skin tones
- Swelling, blisters or shiny areas
- Hard, swollen, dry, tender or moist skin
- Numbness

If you or your carer notice possible or actual signs of skin damage, please inform your nurse or doctor immediately.

What increases the risk of developing a pressure ulcer?

- Moving less, or spending more time in bed due to pain or tiredness
- Moist skin for example from incontinence
- Poor circulation may reduce blood supply to the skin
- Certain medical conditions for example diabetes
- Previous pressure ulcers
- Poor diet and lack of fluids
- Being at the end of your life

What can I do to help prevent getting pressure ulcers?

Some patients may need support from loved ones with some of the ideas listed below.

- Move around or shift your weight frequently if you are able to
- Keep your skin clean and dry. Wash the skin with a gentle cleanser and pat dry. When drying skin do not rub vigorously.

- Inspect your skin daily. Look closely at your skin daily for warning signs of a pressure sore.
- Try to eat a well-balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids
- Protect your skin. Use emollients if your skin is dry or moisture barrier creams to protect your skin from moisture for example from urine or stool. Change bedding and clothing frequently if needed. Watch for fastening e.g. buttons/zips on the clothing and wrinkles in the bedding that irritate your skin.
- Use pressure relieving equipment if you have been provided with it. If you feel you might need pressure relieving equipment then discuss this with your healthcare professional. If you are in bed do not raise the head rest above 30% as this can cause you to slip down the bed and increase shearing damage to your skin.

What will your healthcare team do to help prevent a pressure ulcer?

Your healthcare team will devise a prevention care plan which should include:

- Helping you with or reminding you to change in position regularly. Nursing staff might use slide sheets to help reposition you.
- You might be nursed on specialist equipment like a pressure relieving mattress or cushion. If you are at home your healthcare team can help order equipment you might need.

- Helping to make sure your skin is clean and dry
- Checking your skin regularly: early inspection means early detection
- Helping you have the right diet and plenty of fluids

What happens if I get a pressure ulcer?

- It is important that you still change position regularly or are helped to do so
- Your pressure ulcer will be assessed by your healthcare team. Any treatment will be tailored to your individual pressure ulcer for example you may need special dressing to be put on or you may need antibiotics if the pressure ulcer seems infected.
- Your healthcare team will ensure that if you are in pain because of your pressure ulcer you are provided with pain killers
- The nursing team may need to take a photo of your pressure ulcer. This is so we can record and monitor its healing progress. If we need to do this we will ask you to sign a consent form. If you are unable to do this, we will ask a family member to sign on your behalf. The photo will be attached to your clinical notes and will only be accessible to health professionals

If you have any questions or would like more information about pressure ulcers and their prevention please speak to nursing staff on the ward or your community clinical nurse specialist.

From support in your home, in your community and at the Hospice, all of our services are free of charge.

Our staff provide expert care directly and also partner with other healthcare professionals to ensure care is co-ordinated for each person.

Many people benefit from our services. Every day, we support and care for more than 500 people living with life-limiting illnesses across Birmingham and Sandwell.

We are committed to improving the quality of life for people living with life-limiting illnesses, as well as supporting their families and loved ones during one of the most challenging periods they will face.

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