



Information for You from Your Health Care Team

Protecting Your Skin

Why protect your skin?

Your skin is the largest organ of your body and plays a vital role in keeping you healthy. Your skin is more fragile when you are sick. You want to keep your skin healthy and free of pressure ulcers.

What is a pressure ulcer?

A pressure ulcer is a wound. A pressure ulcer can move quickly from a red or purple spot to an open sore. The open sore can extend through tissue to the bone. It can be painful and hard to heal. It can lead to a serious infection.

What causes a pressure ulcer?

Ulcers occur when there is a lot of pressure on an area of skin for a long period of time. It most often happens on bony areas like the tailbone and heel. Pressure causes damage because it limits the flow of blood to the skin.

What makes you at risk of pressure ulcers?

- Change in mental status
- Loss of bowel and/or bladder control
- Being in bed or chair most of the day
- Not able to turn self
- Not able to eat or on a low protein diet
- Not drinking enough fluid

How can you prevent a pressure ulcer?

Inspect your skin twice a day.

- Look for red marks, blisters, bruises or scratches.
- Use a mirror to see the skin behind you and your feet.
- Check the skin over bony area closely. This is where your skin breaks down first. Look at the back of your head, shoulders, elbows, tailbone, hipbone, and heels.
- Alert your health care provider if you find a sore.

Keep your skin clean and dry.

- Cleanse and moisturize your skin twice a day.

Eat a healthy diet.

- Eat foods high in protein. Try lean meat, beans, eggs, dairy, peanut butter, and health shakes.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Take a multivitamin daily.

Avoid prolonged pressure over bony areas.

- Shift your weight every 15 minutes while in the chair and every two hours while in bed.
- The hospital bed you are on has a special mattress that reduces pressure.
- An air filled cushion can be ordered for when you sit in a chair.
- Place a pillow between your legs and ankles while lying on your side.
- Raise your heels off the bed on pillows.
- Avoid foam rings, sheepskin, or donuts.

Reduce friction and shear.

- Avoid massage over bony areas.
- Do not rub or drag your skin across the bed sheet or chair.
- Keep the head of the bed low.

Learning to care for your skin is a great way to stay healthy!

Talk to your health care team about any questions or concerns.