

# Preventing Pressure Ulcers



Doncaster and Bassetlaw  
Teaching Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

This information leaflet is provided by Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals to explain what a pressure ulcer is (sometimes known as a bedsore or pressure sore) and describe the common causes and steps that can be taken to reduce them.

A pressure ulcer can seriously impact the quality of your life and it's important to understand whether you may be at risk, so you can help prevent a pressure ulcer from developing.

## What is a pressure ulcer?

A pressure ulcer is an area of skin that is damaged. The most common places for pressure ulcers to occur is where bones are close to the surface of the skin or underneath a medical device such as an oxygen mask.

## What causes a pressure ulcer?

Pressure ulcers can develop when the blood supply to an area of skin is reduced, causing the skin to become sore and broken. They can develop in as little as twenty minutes.

## They can occur when:

- An area of skin is placed under pressure for any length of time
- A person has to stay in bed, in a chair/wheelchair for long periods of time
- A person is unable to move around or change position easily
- You are moving up and down in a bed or chair without support, causing friction to the skin
- An area of skin is exposed to moisture such as urine, faeces and sweat.

## Who is at risk of developing a pressure ulcer?

Anyone can develop a pressure ulcer, but some people may be at greater risk than others.

They are more likely to occur if you:



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- have challenges moving
- have had a pressure ulcer before
- have swollen, sweaty or broken skin
- have challenges feeling sensation or pain
- are seriously ill or undergoing surgery
- have a device on your skin such as a plaster cast or an oxygen mask.

### **What are the early signs of a pressure ulcer?**

You may notice one of the following:

- Discoloured patches of the skin that do not change colour when pressing down. The patches are usually red on white skin, or purple or blue on black or brown skin.
- A patch of skin that feels warm, spongy or hard
- A patch of skin that is swollen, itchy or causing pain
- A blister.

The NHS website shows some examples of what pressure ulcers may look like. Search 'NHS Pressure Ulcers' or follow this link: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pressure-sores/>

### **What should I expect when I am in hospital?**

Ward staff will encourage you to follow steps try and stop a pressure ulcer developing. For example, they will:

- Examine you to determine how likely you are to develop a pressure ulcer
- Check your skin for symptoms of a pressure ulcer
- Decide if you will need a specially designed mattress
- Make sure you don't stay in the same position for too long and encourage you to stay active
- Ensure moisture such as urine, faeces and sweat is not left on your skin
- Promote eating a healthy balanced diet and having enough to drink.

A nurse or midwife will also ask you some questions to help them determine the likelihood of a pressure ulcer developing and create a plan to help prevent this from happening.

## How will you check for symptoms of a pressure ulcer?

A nurse or midwife will look at your skin three times a day for early signs of a pressure ulcer. This is important as the start of a pressure ulcer can often be seen before it is felt. Staff will offer you a daily moisturising of the skin. If you have a moisturiser you prefer, please arrange for this to be brought into hospital with you. If a pressure ulcer is found, a Skin Integrity Nurse who specialises in wounds may come and see you.

## Will I need a special mattress?

If the nurse or midwife thinks you are at risk of getting a pressure ulcer you will be provided a specially designed mattress. This mattress will pump air through the bed automatically to reduce any pressure over your bones close to the skin.

## What can I do?

### Keep moving (where possible)

The key action you can take to prevent a pressure ulcer is to keep moving.

Making sure you don't stay in the same position for too long, where possible, will help reduce the pressure over your bones close to the skin. A member of staff will assist you with moving if needed every few hours. If you require support moving into a bed, staff will use slide sheets underneath you to stop your skin rubbing on the mattress.

### Keep your skin moisture-free

Ensure moisture such as urine, faeces and sweat is not left on your skin. If you have episodes of moisture being on your skin, staff will make plans to help you to go to the toilet and keep your skin clean and dry. They will also apply products and creams to the skin several times a day to keep your skin clean and protected.

### Eat healthily and stay hydrated

Eating healthily and drinking well is important for everyone, but especially if you are at risk of a pressure ulcer. Sometimes staff may recommend extra protein in your diet such as meat, fish, eggs and beans.

If you have an existing pressure ulcer, you may be recommended some supplements such as a specialised drink to help with healing the ulcer.

If you're concerned about your nutrition, please talk to a member of the nursing team. You may be referred to a dietitian for assessment and advice.

Some simple additional action staff may recommend include:

- Putting pillows under your legs or put a padded boot around your foot to raise your heels
- Putting your legs up on a stool with your heels and feet floating over the edge to reduce swelling
- Putting pillows around you to help you remain in a position in bed.



These recommendations were developed using an evidence-informed approach, including consideration of research studies, healthcare resources, clinical settings, and individuals' preferences.

### **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

The team are available to help with any concerns/complaints you may have about your experience at the Trust. Their office is in the Main Foyer (Gate 4) of Doncaster Royal Infirmary. Contact can be made either in person, by telephone or email.

### **The contact details are:**

Telephone: 01302 642764 or 0800 028 8059

Email: [dbth.pals.dbh@nhs.net](mailto:dbth.pals.dbh@nhs.net)

Skin Integrity Team

