



apd

**WESTERN CAPE
ASSOCIATION FOR
PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES**

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Sources

Spinal Injury Network
www.spinal-injury.net

SCI Info Pages
www.sci-info-pages.com

How To Care
your elder care guide
www.howtocare.com

adding
value
to
lives

Focus on...

Pressure Care

What is a pressure sore?

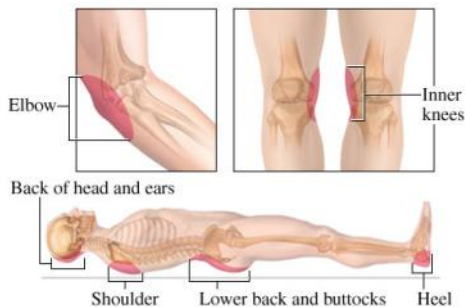
Pressure sores (also known as bed sores) result from prolonged pressure that cuts off the blood supply to the skin, causing the skin and other tissue to die. The damage may occur in as little time as 12 hours of pressure but it may not be noticed until days later when the skin begins to break down. The skin is especially likely to develop pressure sores if it is exposed to rubbing (friction) or moving the skin in one direction and the body in another (shear), as in sliding down when the bed head is raised. Dampness (as in perspiration or incontinence) makes the skin even more liable to develop pressure sores.

Who's at risk?

- People who cannot move themselves are at the greatest risk of developing pressure sores—
 - Spinal cord injury
 - Paralysis
 - Stroke
- the elderly whose skin is thinner and may heal more slowly.
- People with poor nutrition, incontinence problems, diabetes or blood flow (circulation) have increased risk.

Causes

- **Pressure**, or the compression of tissues. In most cases, this compression is caused by the force of bone against a surface, as when a patient remains in a single position for



a lengthy period.

- **Shear force**, or a force created when the skin of a patient stays in one place as the muscles slide down with gravity. This can also cause the pinching off of blood vessels.
- **Friction**, or a force resisting the shearing of skin. This may cause excess shedding through layers of the epidermis.

Signs & Symptoms

- discoloured, torn or swollen skin, especially over bony areas
- signs of infection — skin warmth, swelling, odour, pus

4 Stages of severity

- reddened or darkened skin that will not turn white when firmly pressed
- partial skin loss that may appear as an abrasion, blister or shallow crater
- full skin loss extending to underlying tissue
- full skin loss extending beyond the underlying tissue to muscle and bone

Prevention

Prevention is always better than cure and that is very true for lessening the chances of getting a pressure sore. Look for any reddened areas, rashes, cuts, bruises, scrapes, or indentations from seams or elastic binding. Check also for blisters, bumps, insect bites, dry flaky skin or pimples. Check toenails for any redness or pus formation around the end of the nail. Whenever you notice a problem, try to figure out its cause and make any changes necessary to prevent further problems.

Pressure Relief: Are you changing your position often enough to relieve pressure over bony prominences? ➤

In both bed and wheelchair, change your position according to your skin tolerance. Pressure releases in a wheelchair can be done by pushing straight up, leaning side to side, bending forward over your knees, reclining the seat of your electric wheelchair or having someone tilt you back in your manual chair. Always use your wheelchair cushion. In bed, body parts can be padded with pillows to keep bony prominences free of pressure. Get into the habit of checking your body position for correct alignment and pressure-free positioning of bony prominences.

Equipment: Are you using the best equipment? Does it fit you properly? Here are some concerns:

- Does your wheelchair support your back? Are your footrests the right height? Are you using the best wheelchair cushion?
- Are you using a good mattress?
- Is the correct size catheter being used? Is it being changed frequently enough?
- Are leg bag straps too tight?
- Do braces fit properly? Do you do skin checks after wearing them?

Temperature: Extremes of temperature call for extra caution in protecting your skin:

- **Heat** - Avoid sunburn by covering up or using sun block. Don't put plates of hot food on your lap without protecting your skin. Any exposed pipes in your kitchen or bathroom sink should be wrapped to protect your legs from burns. When you go camping, protect your feet by sitting a safe distance from the campfire.
- **Cold** - Be sure to dress warmly to prevent frostbite if you are out in cold weather for long periods of time.
- **Fever** - Your skin tolerances can change due to the increased body temperature that occurs with a fever. You may find that you cannot lie in one position as long.

Body Weight: A correct or average body weight for your height is desirable. Being overweight can cause increased pressure on bony prominences, while excess pressure over bony prominences may occur because there is less padding (muscle and fat) over these surfaces.

Clothing / Shoes: Proper fit is important. Avoid sitting on seams and back pockets, and always check your skin carefully after wearing new shoes or clothing. Loose clothing can form wrinkles that put pressure on your skin, while overly tight clothing can hinder circulation.

Treatment

1. Keep pressure off the sore!
2. Maintain good hygiene. Wash with mild soap and water, rinse well, pat dry carefully (but gently). Do not rub vigorously directly over the wound.
3. Evaluate your diet -- are you getting enough protein, calories, vitamins A and C, zinc and iron? All of these are necessary for healthy skin.
4. Review your mattress, wheelchair cushion, transfers, pressure releases, and turning techniques for possible cause of the problem.
5. If the sore seems to be caused by friction, sometimes a protective transparent dressing such as Op-Site or Tegaderm may help protect the area



by allowing the skin to slide easily.

6. If the sore does not heal in a few days or recurs, consult your health care provider.