Skin inspection

Regularly check your skin for signs of early damage as this will allow action to be taken to prevent a pressure ulcer from developing.

Be aware of your skin's normal colour, texture and temperature, this will help you identify any changes that occur due to pressure.

It is particularly important to check the areas that you sit or lie on. If you are not able to do this yourself get a carer to do this for you.

Skin care

Keep your skin clean and dry. Wash the skin daily. If your skin requires more frequent washing, for example due to incontinence, use a soap substitute such as aqueous cream to prevent stripping the skin of its natural protective oils. Ask your pharmacist for advice on the available products.

Incontinence

If incontinence is a problem this can increase your risk of pressure ulcers as your skin will be more vulnerable to damage. The use of pads to contain this may help. Advice can be obtained from a health care professional.

Keep moving and changing position

Changing your position regularly, even by a small amount, will help prevent skin damage or pressure ulcers. If you are unable to move or change your position alone your carer may need to help you. It is good to have position changes as part of your daily routine. If you do have any signs of early skin damage try to avoid sitting or lying on this area.

Nutrition

Eating a nutritious diet will help keep your skin in good condition and also help you to avoid pressure ulcers. Try to eat regular well-balanced meals.

Contact details

If you are concerned that you may have pressure damage stay off the area and contact your GP surgery to access a healthcare professional.

Are you at risk?
What is a pressure ulcer?
A pressure ulcer, also known as a bed sore or pressure sore, is damage which has occurred to the skin as a result of pressure.

What causes a pressure ulcer?
Skin damage results from the weight of the body pressing down on an area of skin for too long without relief, usually on a surface that is too firm/hard. This reduces blood supply to the area resulting in skin damage, which may appear as a red area, blister, or an open wound.

Shearing forces can also cause skin damage. This is when layers of the skin are forced to slide over one another, for example when you slide down, or are pulled up, in a bed or chair.

Who is at risk?
Pressure ulcers can affect people of all ages, especially those:
- with problems changing their position and poor mobility
- who are acutely ill
- who have reduced body sensation
- with incontinence
- with poor nutritional status/reduced appetite/weight loss
- with poor circulation

Common sites for pressure ulcers
Pressure ulcers can occur anywhere but tend to be over a bony area. For example:
- bottom
- heels
- elbows
- ankles
- spine
- hips

Inspecting your skin
A change in skin colour is often the first sign of a pressure ulcer. This may lead to:
- a hard, swollen, warm area
- a blister
- broken skin
- an open wound

This may or may not be associated with pain or discomfort.

It is normal for a red mark to appear on the skin following pressure. Within 20 minutes of pressure relief this should disappear. With darker skin tones this may present as a darker or purple discolouration.

If after 20 minutes the skin marking does not disappear this may indicate early pressure damage.

If you would like this information in another format, i.e. large print or another language, please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) department on 01793 604031.

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