

Pressure ulcers: the warning signs and how to prevent them

Tips for front line care workers

Pressure ulcers, also known as bed sores and pressure sores, are everyone's business and you play a key role in helping to prevent and manage them.

This leaflet is for front line care workers and explains who's at risk of developing pressure ulcers, what you need to look out for and how can you reduce the risk. You can use it to develop your own knowledge or as a reminder in your day to day work.

Why is it important to look out for pressure ulcers?

They can be extremely painful and can even be life threatening if left untreated.

They can often be prevented which is why it's important that you know who's more at risk, how to look out for them, prevent them and what to do if someone does develop one.

If pressure ulcers are the result of neglect, poor care or they aren't treated properly, this is a **safeguarding** issue. This could have serious consequences for you and your employer.

What are pressure ulcers?

Pressure ulcers are damage to the skin and the tissue underneath it as a result of pressure on the skin. They usually develop on skin that covers bony parts of the body such as heels, ankles, tailbone and hips.



How can pressure ulcers develop: who's at risk?

Anyone can get a pressure ulcer, which is why it's important that you know the warning signs. However, some people are at higher risk than others.

Are any of these statements true for anyone you support? If so, they might be at higher risk of developing a pressure ulcer.

- ✓ They have impaired mobility or spend a lot of time in the same position such as sitting or lying down
- ✓ They're incontinent or regularly have wet skin
- ✓ They have reduced feeling in any part of their body
- ✓ Try not to send out unnecessary or irrelevant information.
- ✓ They're unable to tell anyone about any discomfort, itchiness or pain
- ✓ They have delicate or thin skin
- ✓ They have a poor diet or don't drink enough water
- ✓ They're recovering from an illness or surgery, which may impact on mobility or other risk factors
- ✓ They do repetitive behaviours, such as rocking or rubbing objects which put pressure on area(s) of their body
- ✓ If they have other risk factors, think about how long they have part of their body in contact with other things like glasses, hearing aids, oxygen masks, wrist bands for alarm call buttons or TV remote controls.



People should regularly change position and move as much as is possible for them



Ensure they dry their skin thoroughly after washing, but without vigorous rubbing



Check their skin every day for early signs and symptoms of pressure ulcers

How can people reduce the risk of pressure ulcers?

Here are some simple things that people can do to reduce the risk of developing pressure ulcers – they might be able to do it themselves or you could support them.



Be careful moving to ensure their skin isn't dragged



Get advice from a GP or nurse about whether they need prescribed creams or sprays to protect their skin



Have a healthy, balanced diet and enough to drink



Stop or cut down on smoking – it can restrict blood circulation







What do I need to look out for?

If you support someone with personal care look out for:

- part of the skin becoming discoloured (people with pale skin tend to get red patches, while people with dark skin tend to get purple or blue patches)
- discoloured patches not turning white when pressed
- a patch of skin that feels warm, spongy or hard
- pain or itchiness in the affected area.

Any of these could be early signs of a pressure ulcer and the person should contact their GP or nurse. There are photos you can check with on the React to Red Skin website at www.reactoredskin.co.uk.

Get medical advice immediately if someone has:

	red, swollen skin
	pus coming from a pressure ulcer or wound
	cold skin and a fast heartbeat
	severe or worsening pain
	confusion that's unusual for them; a change to their usual level of understanding and/or behaviour
	a high temperature (fever) of 38C (100.4F) or above.



Getting the right support

Social care and health services should do a risk assessment around developing pressure sores for each individual.

Anyone at risk should have a 'tissue viability' care plan which might include monitoring the individual's skin and using preventative measures, such as regular repositioning or pressure relieving cushions or mattresses.

If their care plan doesn't include this, talk to the individual and your line manager. If someone is accessing care and support in their own home or has limited mobility, their GP should do this risk assessment.

