

## Pressure Injury Prevention

A pressure injury is an area of damage to the skin and tissue under it. This usually happens over a bony area of the body. It may happen when there is strain on the skin from:

- Constant pressure
- Rubbing against a surface
- Too much moisture
- Poor nutrition
- Poor blood flow

*If you have any questions, ask your care team.*

The skin can become red and warm to touch. It may open and form an ulcer or wound.

Anyone can get a pressure injury. But some people are more likely to get one than others.

The following can increase your pressure injury risk:

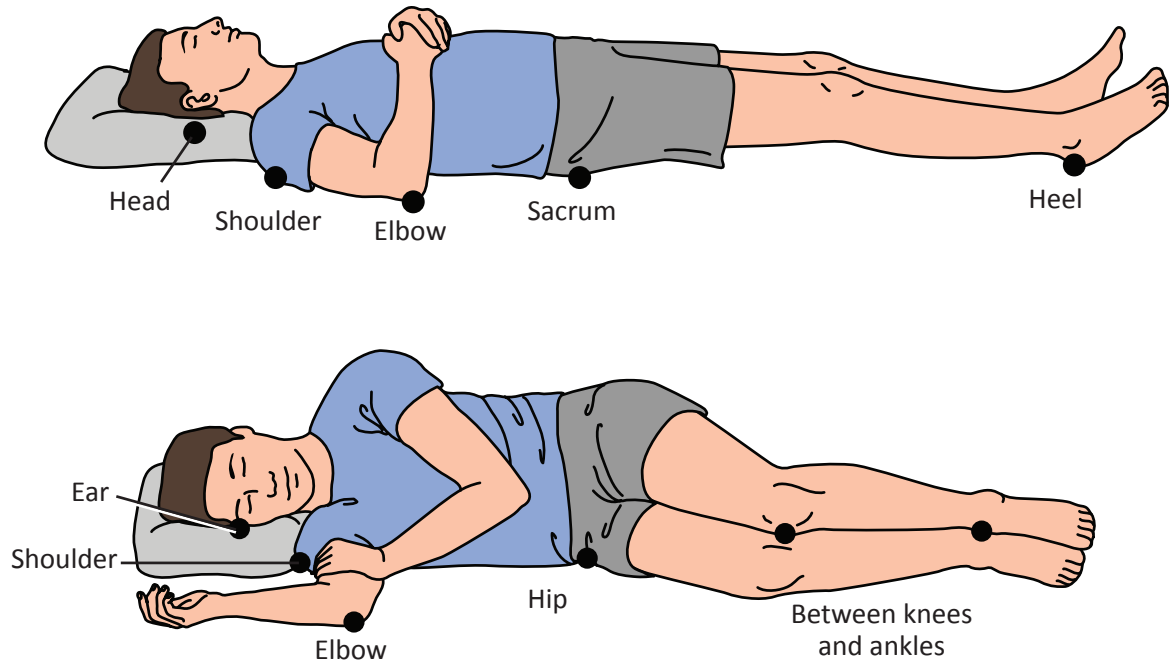
- Poor nutrition
- Moisture in the area (due to sweating, or loss of bowel or bladder control)
- Being unable to change positions without help
- History of pressure injuries
- Spending a long time in a chair or bed
- Spending a long time in the same position
- Decreased feeling to an area of the body
- Reduced mental alertness
- Advanced age
- Chronic illness

When you spend a long time in bed, injuries most often happen on the:

- Back of your head
- Shoulder blades
- Hip bone(s)
- Sacrum (lower spine)
- Ears
- Between your knees
- Elbows
- Heels

See Figure 1 on the next page.

**Figure 1**

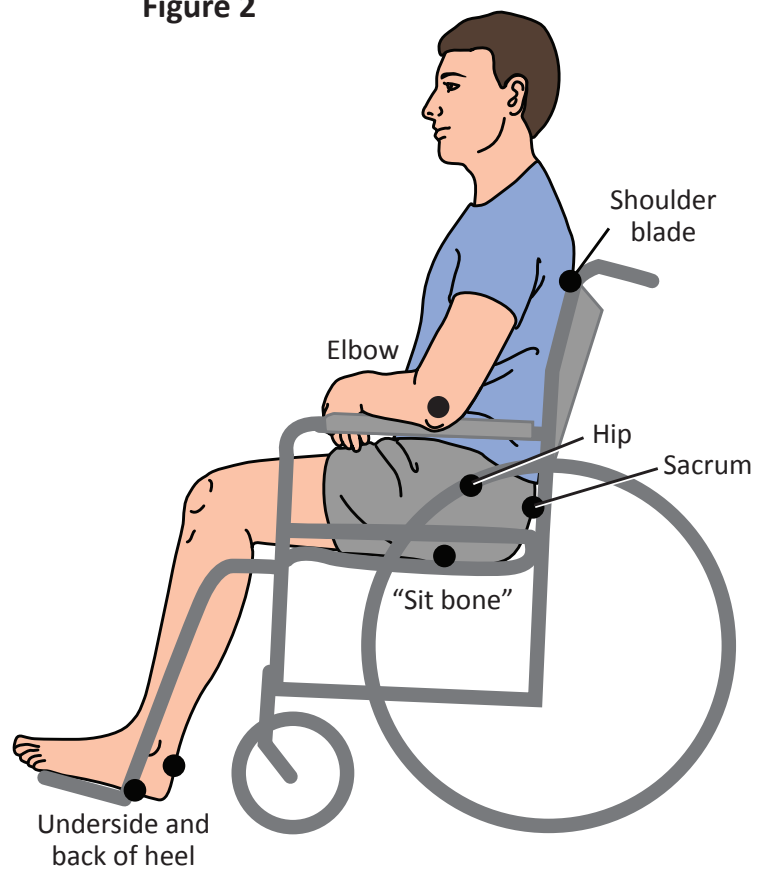


People who spend a long time in a chair or wheelchair may have injuries form on their skin over their:

- Shoulder blades
- Elbows
- Sacrum (lower spine)
- "Sit bone"
- Heels

See Figure 2.

**Figure 2**



## **In the hospital**

### ***Prevention***

Your care team will follow guidelines from the Northwestern Medicine Pressure Injury Prevention Program. This program will help make your hospital stay as safe as possible.

The first step involves finding out about your risks for pressure injury. The nurse will ask you about:

- Your eating habits
- How well you move, walk and change position
- Bladder or bowel leakage problems
- Current or past skin breakdown
- History of chronic illnesses

Based on your risk, your care team will make a plan to prevent skin breakdown. This plan will change as your condition changes.

### ***Diet***

A healthy diet is key to preventing and treating pressure injuries. Eat plenty of protein, such as chicken, fish, cheese and yogurt. Drink enough fluids. Your physician may prescribe supplements to give you more nutrients.

### ***Positioning***

If you spend a long time in the bed or chair, staff will:

- Turn or reposition you at least every 2 hours.
- Keep the head of your bed at an angle of 30 degrees or less (except during meals or for medical reasons). This position helps prevent you from sliding down in bed and rubbing against the linens.
- Use pillows, foam wedges, boots and/or a chair cushion to:
  - Limit pressure over bony parts and reddened areas.
  - Reduce pressure between the mattress or chair and your body
  - Reduce pressure between your body parts such as your arms and legs

### ***Skin care***

Staff will care for your skin in these ways:

- Keep your skin clean and dry.
- Use pads under and between skin folds to draw moisture away from the skin.
- Apply cream or ointment to prevent dry skin or to protect your skin from stool or urine.
- Apply protective pads on bony areas.

## ***Your role***

You can also help prevent pressure injuries on your skin.

- Eat the healthy meals that are given to you.
- Tell staff about any soiling, skin redness or discomfort.
- Change positions often. Ask staff for help as needed. They can take steps to reduce the pressure and friction of the linen against your skin.

## **At home**

You can use some of these same care guidelines at home to prevent a pressure injury for yourself or your loved one. The nurse can explain these methods, so you or a family member can use them at home.

To prevent pressure injuries, follow these guidelines:

- Avoid pressure over bony areas of the skin.
- Change positions every 1 to 2 hours.
- Keep skin clean and dry.
- Use cream to avoid dryness or use ointment to protect skin from stool and urine.
- Check the skin every day for redness or breakdown.
- Do not massage bony or red areas of the skin.
- Eat healthy meals.
- Place pillows under the calves to prevent heel pressure. This raises the heels off a surface. Do not place pillows under the knees.

Talk to your physician or nurse about the right way to use special cushions, such as foam or air pads. Do not use donut-shaped cushions.