

*Our Pressure  
Injury Prevention  
program helps  
to keep you safe  
during your  
hospital stay.*

## 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 occur when there is strain on the skin from:

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

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

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

The following can increase a person's pressure injury risk:

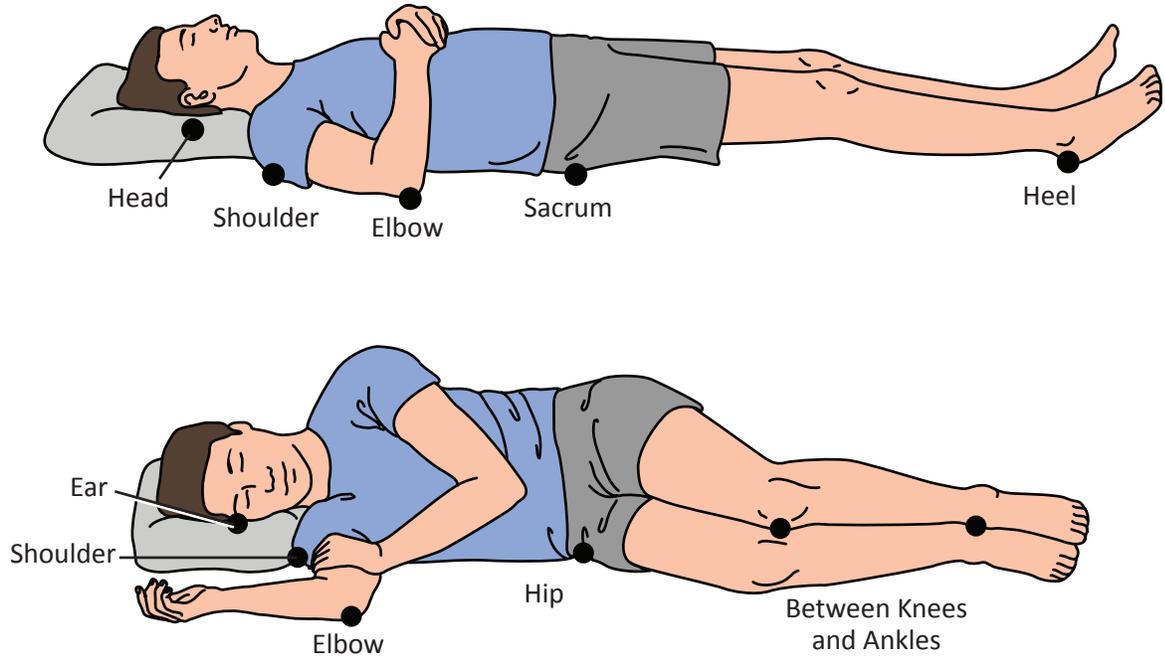
- Poor nutrition
- Moisture in the area (due to sweating or loss of bowel or bladder control)
- Lack of mobility (unable to change positions without help)
- History of pressure injuries
- Long periods of time in a chair/bed or in the same position
- Decreased feeling to an area of the body
- Reduced mental alertness
- Advanced age
- Chronic illnesses

When a person is confined to bed, injuries most often develop on the:

- Back of the head
- Shoulder blades
- Hip bone(s)
- Sacrum (lower spine)
- Elbows and heels

See Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

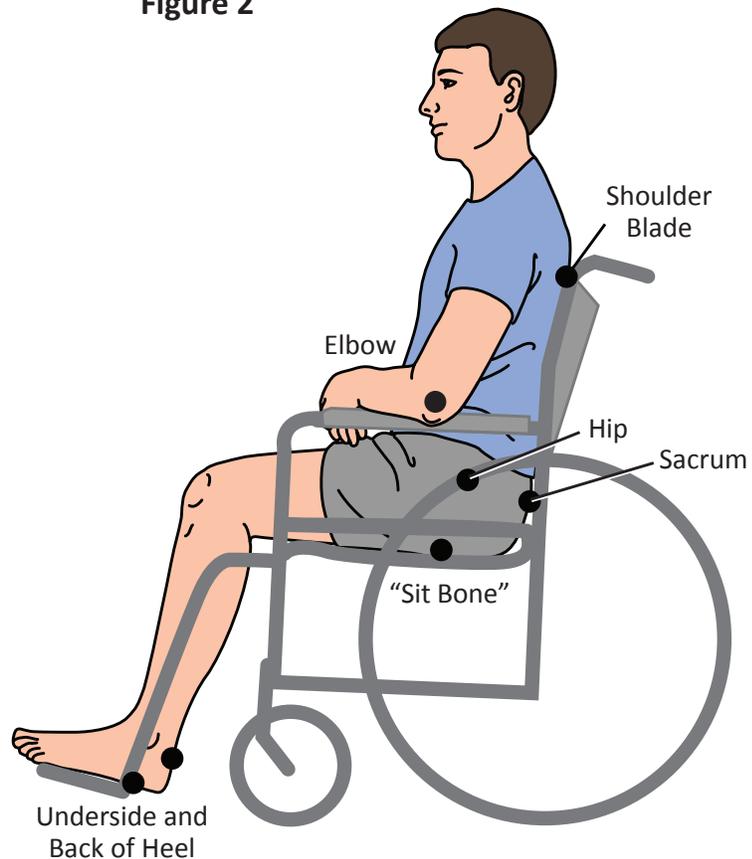


People who spend long periods of time in a chair/wheelchair have injuries form on the skin over:

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

See Figure 2.

**Figure 2**



## **In the Hospital**

### ***Prevention***

The Pressure Injury Prevention program at Northwestern Memorial Hospital has been created to make your hospital stay as safe as possible.

The first step involves your risk assessment. The nurse will ask you about:

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

Based on your risk, a plan to prevent skin breakdown will be put into place. This plan will change as your condition changes.

### ***Diet***

A healthy diet is key to both the prevention and treatment of pressure injuries. Be sure to eat plenty of protein (for example chicken, fish, cheese, yogurt) and drink enough fluids. Your doctor may prescribe supplements to provide added nutrients.

### ***Positioning***

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

- Turn/reposition you at least every 2 hours.
- Keep the head of your bed at an angle of 30° or less (except during meals or for other 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/chair and your body.
    - Arms, legs and the rest of your body.

### ***Skin care***

Staff will:

- 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 dressings on bony areas.

## **Your Role**

To help prevent pressure injuries, you can assist by:

- Eating the healthy meals that are provided.
- Telling staff about any soiling or skin redness/discomfort.
- Changing positions often. Ask staff for help as needed. Then steps can be taken to reduce the pressure and friction of the linen against your skin.

## **At Home**

Some of these same care guidelines can be used at home to prevent pressure injury for yourself or your loved ones. The nurse will be happy to explain these methods, so you or a family member can use them at home.

Prevention includes:

- Avoiding pressure over bony areas of the skin.
- Changing positions every 1 to 2 hours.
- Keeping skin clean and dry.
- Using cream to avoid dryness or using ointment to protect skin from stool and urine.
- Checking the skin daily for redness or breakdown.
- Eating healthy meals.
- Placing pillows under calves to prevent heel pressure by raising the heels off any surface.

Talk to your doctor or nurse about proper use of special cushions (foam, air, etc.). Do not use donut-shaped cushions, massage bony or red areas of the skin or place pillows under the knees.

## **Northwestern Medicine – Health Information Resources**

For more information, contact Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Alberto Culver Health Learning Center (HLC) at [hlc@nm.org](mailto:hlc@nm.org), or by calling 312.926.5465. You may also visit the HLC on the 3rd floor, Galter Pavilion at 251 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL. Health information professionals can help you find the information you need and provide you with personal support at no charge.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at [nm.org](http://nm.org).

*Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.*

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363 or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

Developed by: NMH Pressure Ulcer Prevention Task Force, Wound/Ostomy Nursing