

Pressure Ulcer Prevention Advice Leaflet

What is a pressure ulcer?

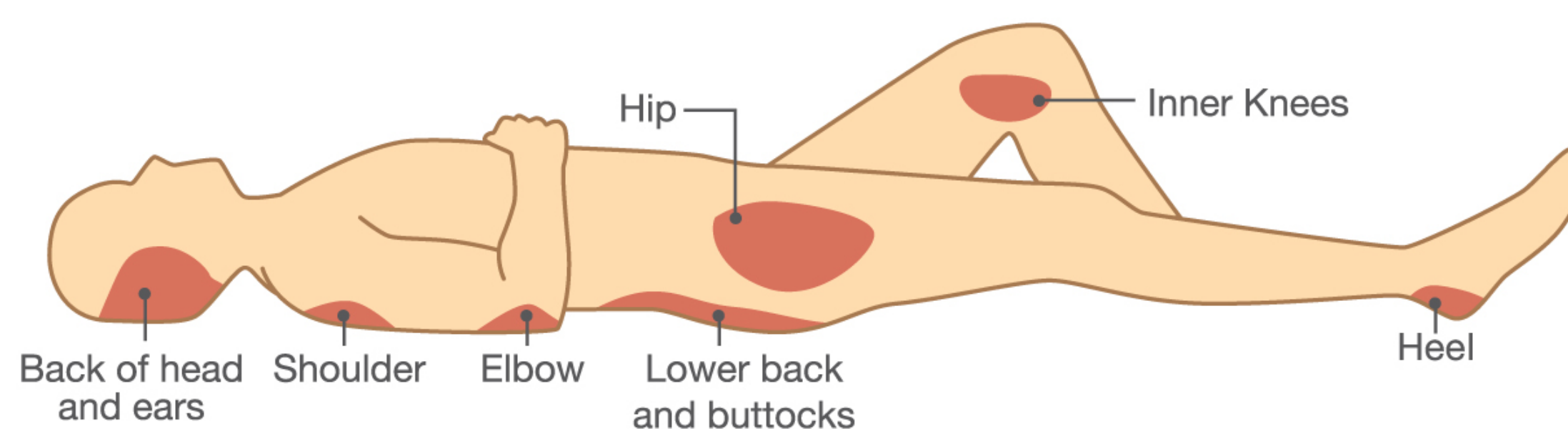
A pressure ulcer (or bed sore) is a wound that develops when pressure is applied to the skin for a prolonged period, causing reduced blood flow to the area. They can be painful and cause disfigurement.

Where do pressure ulcers occur?

They are most likely to develop on parts of the body where the bones are closer to the surface. The areas most at risk are the heels, ankles, knees, hips, bottom, base of the spine, elbows, shoulders and back of the head.

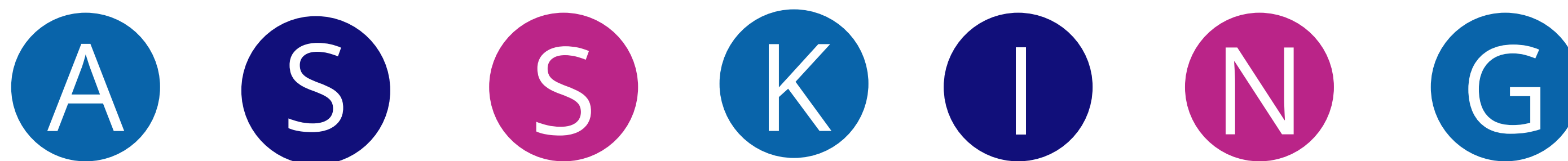
What is a device related pressure ulcer?

These occur when a device, such as an oxygen mask, PEG tube, catheter, plaster cast, presses on the skin and causes the skin to develop an open wound.



PRESSURE SORES

What can you do to help prevent pressure ulcers?



Assess the risk

Anyone can be at risk of a pressure ulcer, however some factors can make people more at risk. The more factors someone has, the more at risk they are:

- Reduced Mobility – remaining in bed or a chair for long periods and are unable to reposition yourself
- Medical devices – e.g. plaster casts, catheters, gastrostomies, oxygen tubing, adhesive dressings
- If you are acutely unwell, e.g. a urine or chest infection
- You take certain medicines such as steroids, chemotherapy, blood thinners, beta-blockers
- If you have reduced sensation or you are unable to tell someone that you are in discomfort or pain
- You have seizures, are restless or fidget
- Being under or overweight
- Malnutrition (eating an unbalanced diet)
- Dehydration (not drinking enough fluids)
- You have circulatory conditions that affect your blood flow
- You are affected by incontinence or excessive sweating
- If you have had previous pressure ulcers
- Aged over 50
- Have memory impairment e.g. dementia, brain damage



Skin checks

It is important to check the skin, particularly over bony areas, daily for early signs of skin damage:

- Look - In light skin tones, areas that are red and don't blanch (go pale when pressure is applied with your finger) are at risk and in darker skin tones, at risk areas can change to a grey/bluish/purplish colour (as seen in photos below). Also look for blisters (in any skin tone).
- Feel – the area can feel warm or cool compared to the surrounding skin, it could also feel hard or boggy

Early Signs of Skin Damage



Surface

To reduce the risk of pressure ulcers, keep your bedding smooth, and avoid placing towels and blankets underneath you when lying or sitting. Your healthcare provider may provide you with pressure-relieving equipment; mattress, cushion, gel pads, foam pads, or friction-reducing pants/booties. If you have been prescribed pressure relieving equipment ensure that you use this when sitting or lying down. Contact your healthcare provider if the pressure relieving equipment is damaged or not working.

Keep moving

Any movement, however small, can help to reduce the pressure being applied to areas of the body. This could be rolling over in bed, standing up, dancing, rocking side to side when sitting or going for a walk. It is important to do this every hour. If you have mobility issues, speak to your healthcare professional as you may require an additional assessment.

Incontinence/moisture

If you are affected by incontinence or sweating, this can increase your risk of developing pressure ulcers. You can do the following things to help:

- Ensure the skin is dry
- Pat the skin dry, do not rub it
- Avoid using perfumed soaps, talcum powder and scented moisturisers
- Use prescribed barrier creams / sprays provided by your healthcare provider
- If you wear incontinence products and apply cream to your skin, check if the products compatible. Some creams can reduce the absorption of urine so it remains in contact with the skin and increases the risk of skin damage

Nutrition/hydration

For general health, but also prevention of pressure ulcers, it is good to eat a variety of food and drink enough fluid to stay hydrated. The aim is:

- 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day,
- protein rich foods such as meat, eggs, fish, pulses, beans with each meal
- carbohydrates such as rice, pasta, bread and potatoes with each meal
- dairy foods (or alternatives) such as milk, cheese and yoghurt – aiming for
- one pint of milk or a variety of milk-based foods, per day
- 1.6-2L of fluid per day. This can include water, tea, coffee and juice

If support is needed with this, then talk to a healthcare professional who may be able to provide more information or if needed, refer to appropriate services such as dieticians.



Get help

If you notice changes to your skin and think you are developing a pressure sore, contact your health professional and explain your concerns

Resources

Total Wellbeing Luton: 0300 555 4152 – they provide a range of support including emotional health, stop smoking, weight management, exercise on referral, long term health condition support and social prescriptions.

<https://www.totalwellbeingluton.org/home>

NHS website information on pressure ulcers - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pressure-sores/>