

Staying healthy

How to prevent
pressure ulcers

Including:
fluid intake,
nutrition,
skincare,
and the
prevention
of falls.



Staying healthy:

How to prevent pressure ulcers

Introduction

Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust has provided this booklet to help you stay healthy and to prevent pressure ulcers (bed sores), which can have a negative impact on a person's day-to-day life.

Please read this document to help yourself and the ones you care for, to ensure we can say **NO to pressure damage**.

Torbay and South Devon 
NHS Foundation Trust

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To view pressure ulcer prevention films, go to:

<http://pressureulcers.hiblio.tv/>

What are pressure ulcers?

Pressure ulcers are also known as bed sores or pressure sores. They are caused when part of the body (usually a bony area) is under constant pressure. They can range from discoloured skin to open wounds.

Pressure ulcers can be very serious, so we need to work together to prevent them.

There is an increased risk of developing ulcers if:

- The person affected cannot move easily
- A lot of time is spent lying or sitting in one position
- Loss of appetite is a factor or there are problems in being able to eat or drink well
- Weight is above or below normal range
- There is an underlying health condition such as heart failure, diabetes, problems with circulation, sensation in your limbs or arthritis; or after a stroke
- The person has memory problems or dementia
- They have continence issues
- An appliance such as a cast or brace is worn

Save your SSKIN

S = Support surface.

Ensure any equipment you may have is fit for purpose and meets patient's needs.

S = Skin inspection.

Regularly check areas of the body that may be under pressure. Report any painful areas to your health professional.

K = Keep moving

Change your position at least every two hours. If possible keep your heels free from pressure.

I = Incontinence

Always ensure any issues regarding continence are discussed with your health professional.

N = Nutrition and Hydration

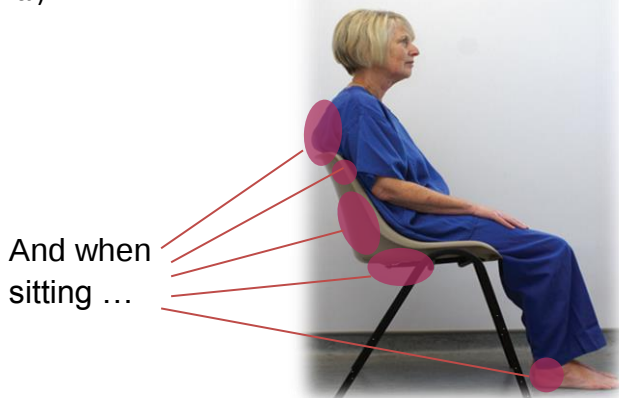
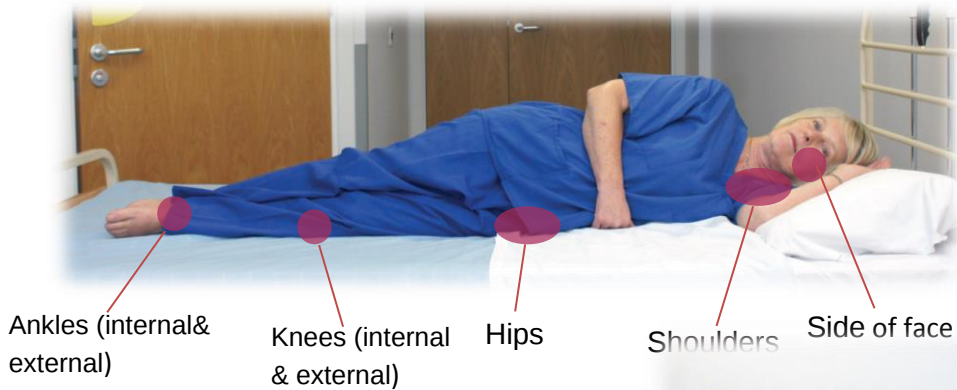
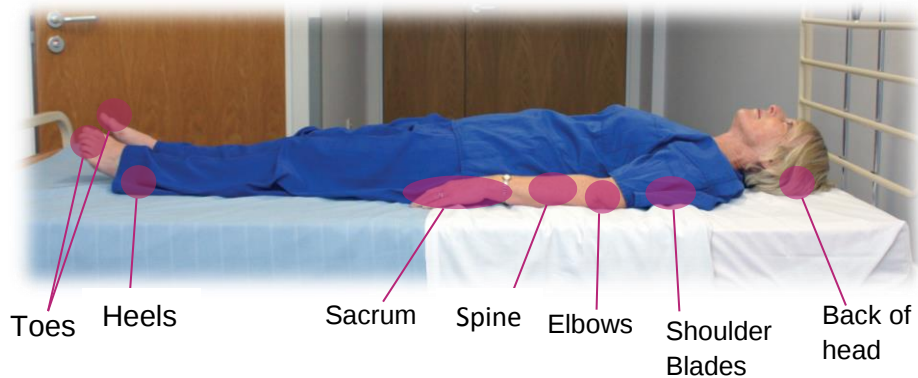
It is important to eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids.

For further advice refer to a healthcare professional

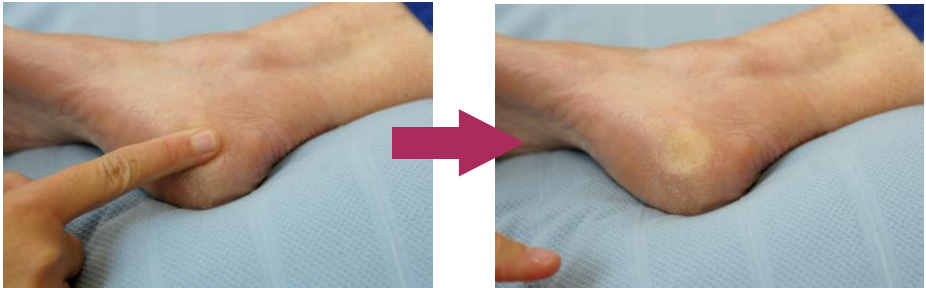
The danger points

Areas of the body that are prone to pressure ulcers:

When lying down...



Blanching – Early recognition of pressure ulcers



1. Put gentle pressure on the area with your thumb or finger
2. Press and hold gently
3. Remove your finger
4. Look at the colour of the skin when you release your thumb or finger

If the skin turns white, then back to the original colour (blanching), there is still a healthy blood flow.

If the area doesn't turn white and remains the original colour (non-blanching), then please refer to the local relevant healthcare professional.

Or contact:

- Torbay Area – 01803 219 700 or
- Care Direct Devon on 0845 155 1007

Alternatively, call your GP surgery and ask for the nurse.

Keep drinking

Fluid intake is essential to provide nutrients and oxygen to the skin, and to remove toxins. It will also replace the fluid lost from breathing, sweating and passing water.

Factors that may affect water loss include:

- Body size
- Room temperature
- Body temperature
- Activity level

As a guide, a person should drink 1.2 litres (2.1 pints) of fluid per day. For example, eight 150ml cups or glasses:



Dehydration signs and symptoms:

These can be the tell-tale signs that more fluid is needed:

- Dry mouth
- Cracked lips
- Dark urine
- Poor communication skills
- Sunken eyes
- Confusion
- Lethargy/ tiredness
- Low blood pressure

Tips to reduce dehydration

- Make sure drinks are always to hand and are offered frequently
- Eat high-fluid foods such as jellies, soups and yoghurts
- Have chilled drinks
- Ensure supplements are taken, if required, and that they are in flavours that are liked
- Make sure there are no issues with swallowing
- Check that dentures fit properly
- Use a straw or beaker, with handle in the correct position to be able to reach it

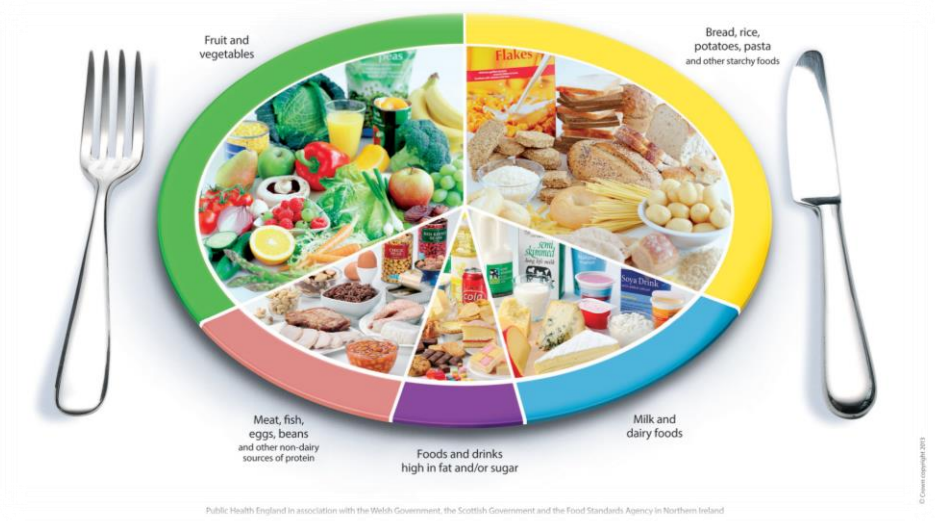


For advice, please contact the relevant healthcare professional.

Eat well

A balanced diet is important for healthy skin. It is necessary to eat enough protein, which can be obtained in eggs, meat and fish, with a good variety of vitamins and minerals.

The eatwell plate has been developed to help people get the balance right. It shows how much food should come from each nutritional group.



Six smaller meals might be preferred rather than three large meals.

If an increase in weight is needed, then add small amounts of extra food alongside a balanced diet. For example:

- An extra layer of butter on bread
- Cream on puddings
- Full-fat milk

Doctors may also prescribe supplements if needed. These can also be bought over the counter.

Skin treatment

It is important to keep skin clean as it will reduce the risk of infection. However, it is important to remember that too much washing or use of harsh soaps can dry the skin. Use mild soap or oils.

Moisturising protects skin from drying out, so use a simple moisturiser. If skin seems abnormally red or pink, contact your relevant healthcare practitioner.

To keep skin in good condition, it is essential to keep hydrated.



Continence

Many people wait five years or more to seek medical advice for continence issues. It is important to seek medical attention as these issues can often be improved.

Damage can occur if urine, faeces or sweat is allowed to spend time on the skin.

People at high risk of developing damage through continence issues can have barrier creams applied to help protect the skin. These can be prescribed by the doctor or your community/practice nurse.

Most pharmacists will also be able to give advice on the best barrier creams available for purchase.

Products advised for nappy rash are not ideal for use on broken skin. If continence pads are being used, please ask for advice on barrier creams.

Correct seating

Tissue damage, caused by pressure, can occur within 20 minutes.

People who are immobile and are sitting out all day are at greater risk of developing pressure damage than those who are in bed and being moved regularly.

Pressure cushions can help, but an assessment should be completed by a trained professional.

Please be aware that a pressure-relieving cushion will increase the height of a chair, which may mean a person's feet do not touch the floor. This increases the weight put through the buttocks and thighs, raising the risk of pressure damage.

Feet should not be placed onto hard stools with heels pressing into the surface. Use a pillow lengthways under the leg (see picture on page 17).



These are the right positions when sitting

...and this is not



In bed: The 30-degree Tilt

If someone is unable to reposition themselves in bed, they will be at high risk of developing pressure ulcers. The risk can be reduced by tilting their position with the support of pillows; this is called 'The 30-degree Tilt'.

This will need to be done at least every two hours, to change the pressure on parts of the body.

Ensure the person is moved in a structured way. For example: left side, then onto their back, then right side, then onto their back again.

1. Place one or two pillows under the head and neck.
2. Turn the person slightly to 30 degrees, and position the pillows lengthways along their back.
3. Support the legs by placing the pillows lengthways, ensuring that the heels are off the bed.



Hints for moving and handling

When looking after someone with an illness or a disability you may need to help them change position. It is essential that you know about safe moving and handling so you don't hurt yourself or the patient.

Moving, or assisting someone to move, without suitable equipment or techniques can damage fragile skin.

If you are having difficulties, contact your local community occupational therapy or physiotherapy team:

- Torbay area: 01803 219700
- Devon area: 0845 155 1007

If specialist equipment is required, always follow the guidance from the therapist.

Remember as someone gets older their energy levels fluctuate throughout the day, this can mean they may need extra support to move.

Before helping someone to move, ask yourself:

- Do they need your help?
- How heavy are they?
- Are you healthy and strong enough to move them?
- Can you help them on your own? If not is there a neighbour or relative to lend a hand?
- How long will it take you?
- Is there enough space around you?
- Are there any obstacles in the way?
- Are you wearing the correct clothing and shoes?

Remember:

- Make sure your feet are apart in a stride position
- Take a firm hold
- Keep any weight close to your body
- Keep your back straight and bend your knees
- If moving someone up the bed, always use a slide-sheet

Preventing falls

Many falls can be prevented. If a person falls they can be on the floor for some time, this could result in pressure damage so try to reduce the risks.

If a fall occurs try and relieve the pressure, or move position, as often as possible.



Certain health and age related changes increase the risk of falls:

- **Use of certain medications**
Make sure the doctor reviews the medication regularly
- **Loss of flexibility and fitness**
Keep active! Especially with strength and balance training
- **Poor eyesight**
Free eyesight checks may be available or opticians can visit homes

Home hazards can add to the risks. Look out for:

- Cluttered floors and stairs
- Lack of hand and grab rails on the stairs and in bathrooms
- Poor lighting
- Loose rugs and other trip hazards
- Slippery floors

Checking equipment

If you have equipment, please check it regularly and follow the instructions. These are just some types that need to be looked after:



For mobility aids and toileting aids:

- Check the ferrules – the rubber pieces on the bottom of the legs
- Check crutches are at the same height and frames are stable
- Check all pins are in place

For hoists and slings:

- The provider of the equipment should check the hoist or sling every six months and carry out a service every 12 months
- Check if battery is fully charged and works. If it doesn't work make sure the emergency button is not on
- Ensure the sling is compatible with the hoist
- Check sling for any fraying
- Ensure sling is correct size for the person being lifted
- Ensure correct sling is being used for the task
- Once hoisted always ensure you remove the sling unless stated by a healthcare professional

Hints and tips

- Remember, as someone gets older, their energy levels fluctuate throughout the day, which means they may need extra support to move/reposition
- Reposition frequently but do not move by digging heels into the mattress or floor to push back. Always place feet flat on mattress or floor before moving.
- Feet should not be placed on a hard stool with heels pressing into the stool – use a pillow lengthways, under the leg, to provide support



- Do not tuck bedding in at the feet
- Use a mirror to look at the person's heels – this saves a lot of bending and kneeling
- Ensure that the person is sitting at the correct height, with a chair that has arms, and that their feet are flat on the floor

Daily checks

Carry out these checks daily:

-
- Look at the areas of the body that may be at risk, including the sacrum (the large triangular bone at the base of the spine), the heels and the hips
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- Test pink and red areas for blanching (when pressed skin turns white). Red areas should be reported to the local community nursing team.
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- Has the person become unwell quickly and become immobile? If so, report to the community nurse or GP.
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- Are drinks within reach at all times?
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- Are they eating and drinking well?
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