

Notes:

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

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Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Prepared by: Wound Care Committee
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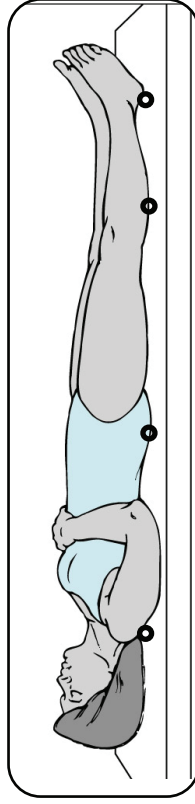
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Pressure Injury (Ulcer) Prevention

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What is a pressure injury?

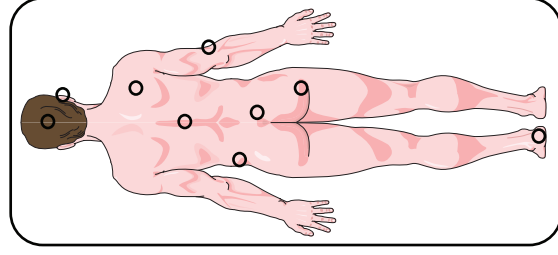
- A pressure injury is an injury to the skin and the tissue under the skin.
- These injuries can happen on bony areas like the heels, elbows, hips, or buttocks (tailbone area) (see circles in pictures).



- The skin may get discoloured (red or darker than your skin's usual colour) and may change into an open sore.
- Pressure injuries are also called **bedsores** or **decubitus ulcers**.

What causes pressure injuries?

- Pressure injuries happen when there is continued pressure on the skin.



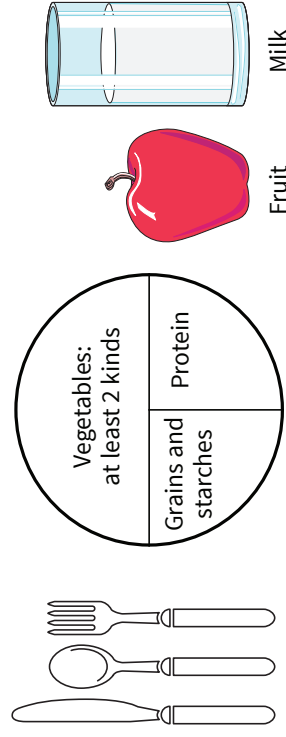
- **It is important to stay hydrated.**
Drink ____ cups of fluids every day. This includes water, milk, and/or non-dairy drinks. Ask your dietitian if there is anything you should not drink.
- If you have a bladder or bowel (bathroom) accident, tell your nurse right away so moisture does not stay on your skin.
- Use a scent-free and pH-balanced soap or cleanser to wash your skin. Ask your nurse if you need help choosing the right product or if you need help bathing.

It is very important to tell your nurse or another member of your health care team if you:

- › See any discoloured skin (red, purple, or darker than your usual skin colour) on the bony parts of your body
- › Feel pain or tingling where there is pressure on your skin
- › Are itchy or numb where there is pressure on your skin

What can I do to help prevent pressure injuries?

- Ask a member of your health care team: “Am I at risk for getting pressure injuries?”
- Keep the head of your bed as low as you can when not eating. This keeps your bum from sliding down in the bed.
- Move your body and change your position often while sitting or lying in bed, like every 15 to 60 minutes. Lean forward and from side to side while sitting. This can help to relieve the pressure.
- Use pillows or wedges to help protect bony areas from pressure.
- Eat healthy foods as often as you can. Make sure you eat foods with a lot of vitamins, minerals, and protein. Protein (from meat, poultry [chicken, turkey], fish, nuts and seeds, or firm tofu) can help you heal faster. If you have questions about what you should eat, please ask to talk with a dietitian.



- › The pressure squeezes the tiny blood vessels that supply the skin with oxygen and nutrients.
- › The blood vessels are not able to supply blood, which causes the skin to die. Over time, the skin starts to break open.
- The skin is more likely to break open if:
 - › you spend most of your time in a bed or a chair (especially if you stay in 1 position).
 - › you slide down in a bed or a chair.
 - › you rub the skin on a bed often.
 - › the skin is moist (wet).
- Pressure injuries can happen fast (sometimes within hours) if the pressure, sliding, or moisture is not stopped.
- When you are admitted to the hospital, a member of your health care team will check your skin. This is to see if you are at risk of getting a pressure injury.

- **You are more at risk of getting a pressure injury if you:**
 - › cannot move or are not able to get out of bed.
 - › lay or sit in 1 position for long periods of time.
 - › have urine (pee) or stool (poop) touching your skin regularly.
 - › are not eating healthy foods.
 - › are not drinking enough fluids.
 - › are overweight or underweight.
 - › have dry skin.
 - › have poor circulation (blood flow).
 - › have little or no feeling (numbness) in your limbs (arms and legs) or other parts of your body because of injury, disease, or medication.
 - › have lowered mental alertness (you are not fully awake, aware, or able to respond normally to things around you) because of medication, surgery, or other factors.
 - › have high blood sugar or diabetes.

How can my health care team help prevent pressure injuries?

- We care about your safety. To help lower your risk of pressure injuries, we will:
 - › Assess your risk
 - › Check your skin often for discoloured or broken areas
 - › Ask you to turn often, to make sure blood flows to all areas of your skin
 - › **Ask you to get out of bed to sit or walk, or change your position in bed as much as you can. This is very important to prevent injuries and help your overall recovery.** We will help you move if you cannot do this by yourself.
- We may also:
 - › Put your legs on pillows or ask you to wear special “booties” that keep pressure off your heels
 - › Order a special mattress that lowers the pressure on your body
 - › Give you a special cushion to protect your skin while sitting
- You will be treated by team members with special knowledge about pressure injuries. These may include:
 - › Dietitians
 - › Occupational therapists
 - › Physiotherapists