

# Adverse Health Events Factsheet:

## Pressure Ulcers

### What is a pressure ulcer?

Pressure ulcers are also called bedsores. They happen when the skin breaks down because of lack of movement. Pressure ulcers start as reddened areas, then turn into blisters. Finally, they become open wounds. They most often happen on the heels, hips, back, head, buttocks, or other areas where the skin is very close to the bone. They can cause serious damage if they are not treated.

### How do pressure ulcers/bedsores happen?

Most people think pressure ulcers take a long time to happen. But they can happen very quickly if you can't move all or part of your body. Pressure ulcers can even develop in a few hours. The people with the highest risk are those with fragile skin, limited ability to move, incontinence, poor circulation or poor nutrition.

### What should hospitals do to prevent pressure ulcers/bedsores?

There are many things that caregivers should do to prevent pressure ulcers. A nurse should turn you every two hours, and they might use a special bed or mattress, or lift your heels or other parts of your body off the bed to reduce pressure. They also might change your feeding or bathroom schedule to prevent sores from forming. They should check your skin every day, especially the parts you can't see yourself.

### What can I do to prevent pressure ulcers/bedsores?

There are several steps you can take to prevent bedsores from happening to you or a family member:

- **Inspect your own skin. Make sure that your caregivers do it every day.** Look at parts of your body that are exposed to pressure. Watch for red areas or blisters, and let someone know if you see one. Let the nurses inspect your skin every day, even in areas that you can't see yourself.
- **Limit pressure by moving often.** If you can, change positions every 1-2 hours. When you move, lift instead of dragging so your skin doesn't rub against the sheets.
- **Ask questions.** Your caregivers may need to move you, use special equipment, or inspect your skin to prevent a pressure ulcer. If you don't understand why something is being done, ask.

### Where can I learn more?

For more information, visit one of these sites:

#### **Association for the Advancement of Wound Care (AAWC)**

<http://www.aawc1.com/>

#### **FamilyDoctor.Org**

<http://familydoctor.org/039.xml>

#### **AGS Foundation for Health in Aging**

[http://www.healthinaging.org/public\\_education/pef/pressure\\_ulcers.php](http://www.healthinaging.org/public_education/pef/pressure_ulcers.php)

### For more information:

More information is available at:

[www.health.state.mn.us/patientsafety](http://www.health.state.mn.us/patientsafety)

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