

Fact: Most pressure ulcers can be prevented

An inservice training article.

Current, evidence-based training and education

All it takes is diligent caregiving

Pressure ulcers... also called bedsores... are one of the most serious diseases that elders can ever get.

A pressure ulcer is a life-threatening disaster for an elder... destroying their quality of life, and causing disability, pain, suffering and death.

But, the fact is, most are completely preventable... with just a few, easy-to-do caregiving techniques.

Dedicated, compassionate caregivers can prevent most pressure ulcers.

It's not difficult.

All that's involved are a few very, very simple... and commonsense... caregiving skills that most anyone can quickly learn.

That's the good news.

The bad news is that, all-too-often, caregivers fail to provide this compassionate care. And far too many elders get pressure ulcers, and suffer greatly and needlessly.

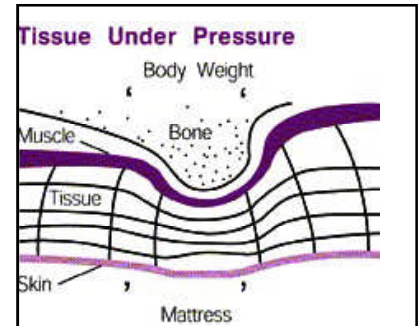
Often, elders with pressure ulcers are a sign of poor, unprofessional caregiving.

It's not rocket science

Preventing pressure ulcers is not "rocket science." Any knowledgeable caregiver can do it.

If you just do the following simple procedures, most pressure ulcers will be prevented under your watch:

- Make sure your immobile elders sitting in a chair are re-positioned at least once every hour.



(NIH diagram)

A pressure ulcer is a disaster for an elder

- Make sure your other elders are re-positioned at least every 2 hours if on a regular mattress, 4 hours if on special pressure re-distribution mattresses.
- Set up a reminder system so that you're always notified when an elder needs re-positioning.
- Never let an elder lie wet and soiled... always keep them dry and clean. Always.
- Do a daily skin check of your at-risk elders: those who are immobile, and those who have diabetes or other conditions that make them vulnerable.
- Never drag your elders across sheets... dragging can cause tears in their delicate skin, and cause a pressure ulcer.
- Use recommended supports to keep their bony areas up off the mattresses.

Notice: We attempt to be as accurate as possible, but the information contained here should not be implemented without checking current guidelines from your own medical and supervisory personnel.

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These few recommendations would prevent most pressure ulcers... if caregivers simply did them diligently, every day, all the time.

This is an area of care where frontline caregivers can have a huge favorable impact on their elders' welfare and quality of life.

Very difficult to heal

The big problem with pressure ulcers, is that they can quickly turn into a worsening, infected, festering lesion, and become extremely difficult to heal.

Reason: They contain colonies of various types of bacteria, including staph, strep and e. coli.

And antibiotics are often not all that effective, because of difficulties in getting the medicine through the tissue to the bacteria.

And, in some cases, resistant bacteria get in the wounds, making the situation even worse.

A major cause of death

Pressure ulcers are a major factor in untimely death among elders.

In hospitals, those elders who develop pressure ulcers within 6 weeks are 3 times more likely to die.

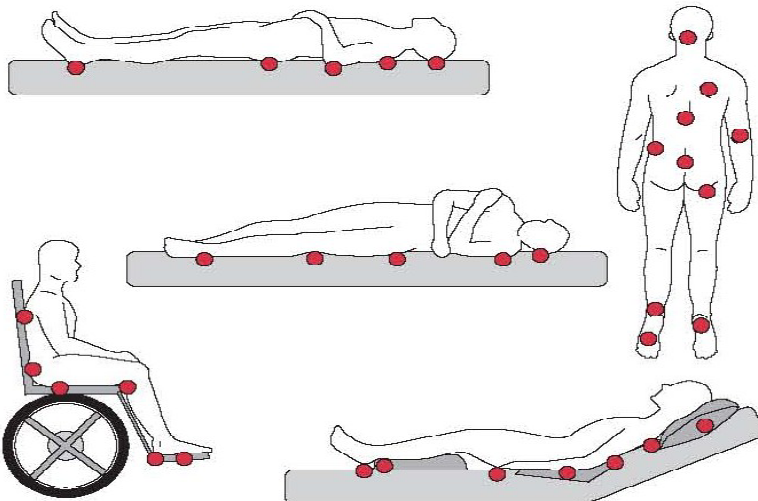
And in research in long-term care residences, development of a pressure ulcer within 3 months of admission was associated with a huge 92% mortality rate, compared to a mortality rate of only 4% in residents who did not develop pressure ulcers.

The answer to all this, of course, is: Prevent them from occurring in the first place.

Pressure Points



Red circles indicate pressure points.



Remember:

- Find out who's at risk
- Help patient eat right and drink fluids
- Make sure pressure is off the heels
- Remember to keep the skin dry
- Assess the skin daily
- Keep good records



**Arkansas Foundation
for Medical Care**

*The Medicare Quality Improvement
Organization of Arkansas*

Locations of pressure ulcers

In elders who must stay in bed, most pressure ulcers form on the lower back below the waist, at the hip bone, and on the heels.

For elders in chairs or wheelchairs, the exact spot where pressure ulcers form depends on the sitting position.

Pressure ulcers can also form on the knees, ankles, shoulder blades, back of the head, and spine.

One hour

You need to be constantly watchful for pressure ulcer development.

Reason: elders who are unable to move, may get pressure ulcers after as little as 1-2 hours in the same position.

Elders who sit in chairs, and who cannot move, can get pressure ulcers in even less time because the force on their skin is greater... and especially if they become wet or soiled.

But here's the problem: An hour goes by very fast in the hustle of caregiving. So it's easy to forget that an elder needs to be moved.

The solution: Develop an alarm/reminder system in your facility that ensures that you're informed each and every time an elder needs to be re-positioned.

An efficient and dependable reminder system is an absolute requirement for proper pressure ulcer prevention.

Watch Alzheimer's elders closely

For those elders who have Alzheimer's disease, you need to be particularly watchful... especially with those in the later stages of the disease.

These elders are especially prone to getting pressure ulcers, because they often spend large amounts of time sitting still in chairs or wheelchairs, or lying in bed.

And if they're having problems, or become wet, or feel pain as the result of ongoing pressure on a part of their body, they often cannot tell you about it.

So a pressure ulcer can develop without anyone knowing it, and become serious in a hurry.

Also, they may be unable to move, or simply forget to move.

You need to always keep in mind that Many Alzheimer's elders are completely dependent upon the care and alertness of frontline caregivers for the prevention of pressure ulcers.

Prevention guidelines

After an elder is admitted, and an accurate assessment statement developed, the National Institutes of Health has these basic recommendations for preventing pressure ulcers:

- Watch healed ulcers closely.

The history of a healed pressure ulcer and its is important, since areas of healed Stage III or IV pressure ulcers are more likely to have recurrent breakdown.

- Inspect the elder's skin at least once a day.
- Bathe the elder when needed for comfort or cleanliness.

Always keep them dry.

- Prevent dry skin. Use recommended creams as necessary.

Vulnerable elders who cannot move themselves can develop pressure ulcers in as little as 1 hour!



- Change the elder's position at least every 2 hours if in a bed, and every 1 hour if in a chair.
- Use recommended supports to keep bony areas up off the mattress.

Proper positioning and support is important

Improper positioning, and for too long of a time, is the major cause of pressure ulcer development.

So, if caregivers can learn a few simple guidelines on positioning their elders, and then be very watchful and alert that the positioning guides are being followed at all times, they could substantially decrease the number of pressure ulcers that develop in their elders.

The fact is, most pressure ulcers are preventable if these precautions are followed.

Here are some current positioning recommendations, from various experts and organizations, including the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services:

- First off, be sure you follow medical personnel's advice closely on the proper positioning of your elders.
Be knowledgeable about the types and locations of positioning devices used to relieve the pressure on your elder's pressure points.
- Make sure your elders are repositioned at least every hour for those in wheelchairs, and every two hours for those in bed, in order to shift points on their body that are under pressure.
- For those elders who can do it themselves, educate them to reposition their key body points every 15 minutes.
- Always use positioning devices, such as pillows or forms, to prevent direct contact between bony prominences (such as knees or ankles).
- An elder with a pressure ulcer on a sitting surface should avoid sitting, until the ulcer is properly healed... unless you can determine a recommended method of relieving pressure on the ulcer.

- Pillows or wedges should be used to keep knees or ankles from touching each other.
- Avoid positioning elders directly on their hip bones (trochanter) when lying on their sides.
- For elders who are completely immobile, pillows should be put under their legs from midcalf to ankle, to keep heels off the bed.

Note: pressure ulcers can quickly form on the heels, and it's an area that is sometimes overlooked by caregivers. Heels should be kept up off the bed.

- Never place pillows behind the knee.
- Be very careful when moving elders, so that you don't scrape their thin, sensitive skin.

Even something as simple as friction against a sheet can damage their very sensitive skin, and cause a pressure ulcer.

Therefore, whenever moving an elder, be careful not to drag their bare skin across the sheets.

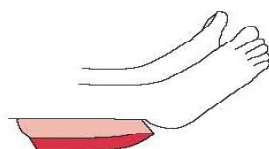
- Maintain the head of the elder's bed as low as possible, consistent with the elder's medical conditions and other restrictions.
- Limit the amount of time that the head of the bed is elevated.
- For those elders in wheelchairs, be sure you always use the recommended form, gel, or air cushions to relieve sitting pressure.

Do not use doughnut shaped cushions, as they can reduce blood flow and increase the chances of getting a pressure ulcer.

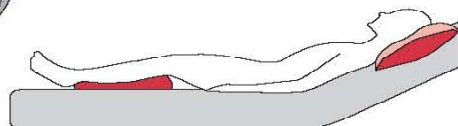
- Keep bedding as wrinkle-free as possible, and make sure there are no crumbs or other foreign materials on the sheets.



Proper position while on side



Proper heel placement



Head of bed elevation limited to 30 degrees or less

Pressure Ulcer Reduction Tips:

- Follow a written turning/positioning schedule
- Turn every two (2) hours in bed
- Use pressure reduction devices on bed, heels and chairs
- Use lift sheet or device to reduce shear and friction



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This diagram, from the Quality Improvement Medicare Internet site, www.medqic.com, shows some of the positions, and support, that are recommended for the prevention of pressure ulcers.

Protect against infection

Cross-infection can be a major problem, that can increase the severity of an ulcer.

This is where bacteria are transferred from one place to another on an elder, or from one elder to another.

It can result in some very serious bacteria getting in to pressure ulcers, and making them much worse than they already are.

To avoid the risk of cross infection:

- Wash your hands with warm water and soap after wound treatment... even if wearing gloves.
- Use a new pair of gloves for each resident, but you can use the same pair of gloves for treating different pressure ulcers on the same resident.

- When treating several infected ulcers on the same resident, treat the less contaminated one first.
- Treatment carts should be left in the hall, and not taken into the elder's rooms.
- Do not share packages of dressings among different residents.
- Wear gowns or masks if you are likely to come in contact with body substances that might soil your clothing or skin.
- Make sure that you protect pressure ulcers from becoming contaminated with feces, especially for those elders who are incontinent.

Note: A properly-cleaned pressure ulcer should show evidence of some healing within 2 to 4 weeks.

If it isn't healing, then medical personnel need to be notified immediately, before it becomes life-threatening.

The value of good nutrition

Do not overlook the value of nutrition for the elder.

Here's what the CMS Pressure Ulcer Guidelines say about nutrition:

"Adequate nutrition and hydration are essential for overall functioning. Nutrition provides vital energy and building blocks for all of the body's structures and processes.

"Any organ or body system may require additional energy or structural materials for repair or function.

"Significant unintended weight loss may indicate under-nutrition or worsening health status.

Good nutrition, including plenty of water, is an important factor in preventing pressure ulcers.



"Continuing weight loss and failure of a pressure ulcer to heal, despite reasonable efforts to improve caloric and nutrient intake, may indicate the resident is in multi-system failure, or an end-stage or end-of-life condition, warranting an additional assessment of the resident's overall condition."

Don't forget the water

"Water is essential to maintain adequate body functions," says the CMS in its guidelines.

"It is critical that each resident at risk for hydration deficit or imbalance, be identified and that hydration needs be addressed." END

Quiz

Preventing Pressure Ulcers

Learning objectives:

1. To understand the importance of preventing pressure ulcers.
2. To learn why frontline caregiver's important role in preventing pressure ulcers.
3. To learn the caregiving techniques that can prevent pressure ulcers.

1. **True, False.** Preventing pressure ulcers is extremely difficult, and can only be accomplished by highly trained caregivers.
2. **True, False.** Most pressure ulcers are preventable.
3. **Which are some procedures that caregivers can do that are proven to prevent pressure ulcers?** (Check all that apply.)
 - a. Keep your elders clean and dry at all times
 - b. Never drag your elders across sheets.
 - c. Make sure your elders are repositioned on schedule.
 - d. Do a daily skin check.
4. **True, False.** A sitting elder, who cannot move, can get a pressure ulcer as quickly as in one hour.
5. **True, False.** Usually, pressure ulcers are easy to heal.
6. **True, False.** Pressure ulcers are a major cause of death and suffering in elders.
7. **True, False.** Alzheimer's elders are often totally dependent on their caregivers for the prevention of pressure ulcers.
8. **True, False.** Good nutrition has been proven to help prevent pressure alters.
9. **True, False.** It's okay to use the same pair of gloves when cleaning pressure ulcers on different residents, as long as the gloves don't get too dirty.
10. **True, False.** Pressure ulcers are often a sign of poor caregiving.

Name_____ Date_____ Score_____

Answers to Pressure ulcer Quiz

- | | |
|------------|-------|
| 1. F | 5. F |
| 2. T | 4. T |
| 3. a,b,c,d | |
| 6. T | 10. T |
| 7. T | |
| 8. T | |
| 9. F | |