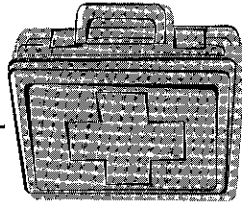


• Pressure Sores

An independent study module






Pressure Sores

Physical inactivity has a serious impact on a person's health. Research has shown that being physically inactive increases a person's risk for disease, disability and even death. One concern for people who are inactive is the possibility of getting pressure sores.

What are pressure sores?

A pressure sore is an area of skin that breaks down when you stay in one position for too long without shifting your weight. This can happen if a person uses a wheelchair, or if they are confined to bed. However, even people who are able to walk can get pressure sores when they must stay in bed because of illness or injury. When a change in position doesn't occur often enough, the constant pressure against the skin reduces the blood supply to that area, and the affected tissue dies. As little as two hours of prolonged pressure may trigger skin damage. Pressure sores may also be called pressure ulcers or decubitus ulcers.

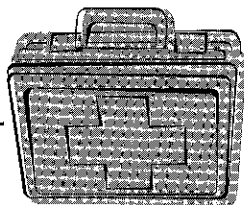


 Go to your worksheet and answer questions #1 and #2.

Are pressure sores serious?

Pressure sores can be extremely serious, depending on how much skin and tissue has been damaged. A pressure sore starts as reddened skin, and gets progressively worse, forming a blister, then an open sore, and finally a crater. Deep sores can go down into the muscle and bone. If pressure sores are not treated properly, they can become infected. An infected pressure sore can lead to a systemic (entire body) infection that may be fatal.

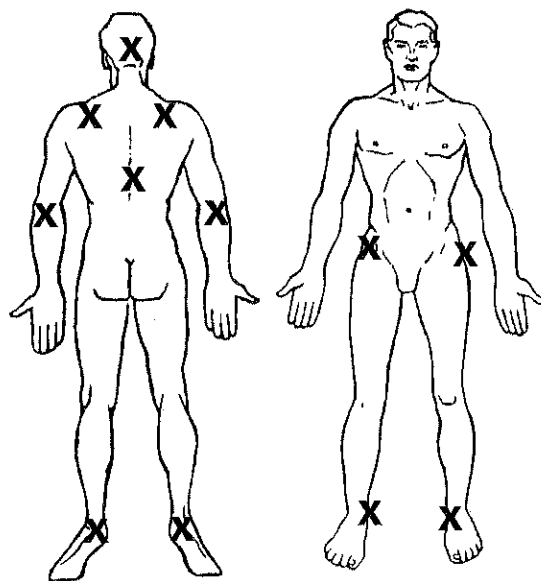
Pressure Sores



Where on the body can you get pressure sores?

Pressure sores usually occur over bony areas. Bony areas are called pressure points because they bear the weight of the body in certain positions. Bony areas would include:

- ▶ Elbows
- ▶ Heels
- ▶ Hips
- ▶ Ankles
- ▶ Shoulders and shoulder blades
- ▶ Back
- ▶ Back of the head



The most common areas for pressure sores are the heels and hips. However, pressure sores are not limited to these areas and often occur in other places as well.

What causes a pressure sore?

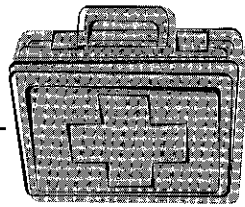
Pressure sores are caused by pressure, scraping of the skin (also known as shearing), friction and moisture.

Pressure on the skin can harm the skin and the layers of tissue underneath that area. When there is pressure on certain parts of the body, the tissue may not get enough blood. This can cause the tissue to become damaged and even die. Creases in bed linens and seams on clothing can also cause pressure.

Shearing happens when the skin is dragged across a surface. For example, being moved up in bed can cause skin shearing if the skin is pulled across the bed surface. Make sure that you lift the person. This will prevent the friction and shearing of the skin.

Moisture makes the skin spongy, increasing the risk of bed sores. Moisture can be due to incontinence, not drying properly after bathing, or sweating. Therefore, ensure that the person is never left in a wet bed or wet clothes.

Go to your worksheet and answer questions #3 and #4.

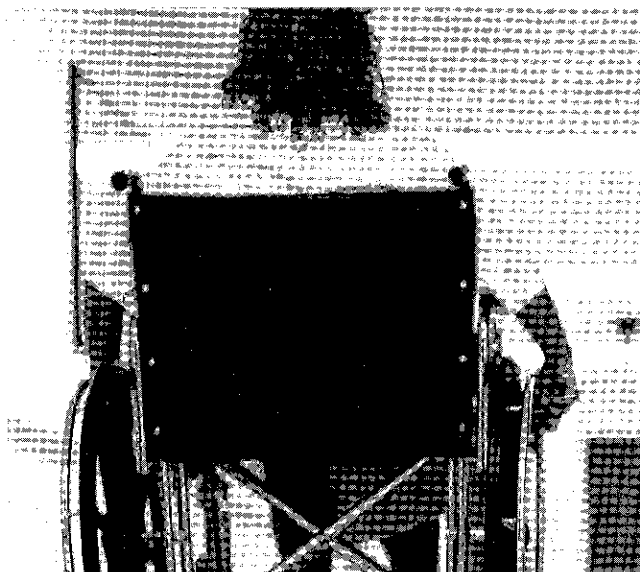
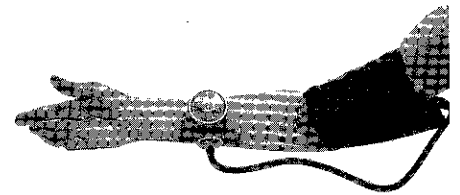


Pressure Sores

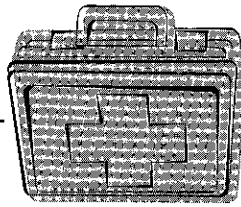
Risk factors for pressure sores

Things that increase the person's risk of having pressure sores include:

- ▶ Age
- ▶ Immobility
- ▶ Excess moisture on the skin
- ▶ Malnutrition and dehydration
- ▶ Diseases and disorders that heal slowly
- ▶ Disease and disorders such as confusion or dementia that lessen mental awareness and may prevent a person from feeling the discomfort of a harmful body position
- ▶ Medications, particularly sedatives
- ▶ Circulatory problems
- ▶ Obesity or very thin people where bones are more prominent
- ▶ Perspiration caused from wearing a brace or other orthopedic device



Pressure Sores

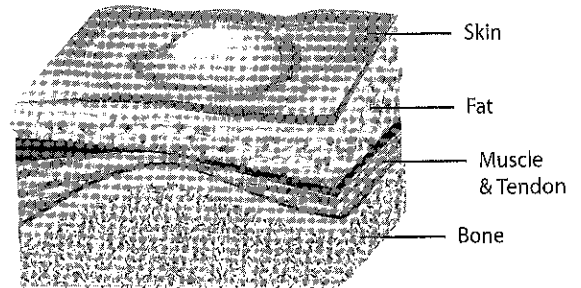


Stages of a pressure sore

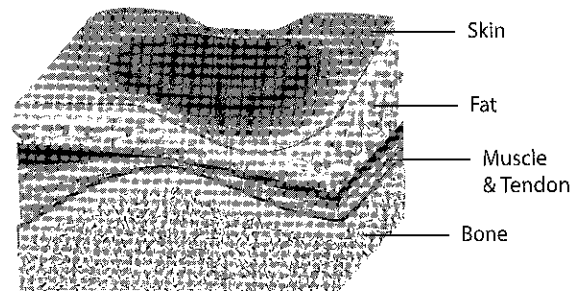
Pressure sores are categorized by severity, from stage 1, (early onset stage), to stage 4, (most severe stage).

- Stage 1** A small area of warm, reddened or purple skin that does not return to its natural color when pressed. This indicates that a pressure ulcer is starting to develop.
- Stage 2** The outer layer of skin breaks down. Blistering and swelling as well as warmth and redness may be seen.
- Stage 3** The skin breakdown now looks like a crater where there is damage to the tissue below the skin. The hole or crater has a foul smell.
- Stage 4** The pressure sore has become so deep that there is damage to the muscle and bone, sometimes tendons and joints. Infection may occur and may tunnel under the skin increasing the size of the sore.

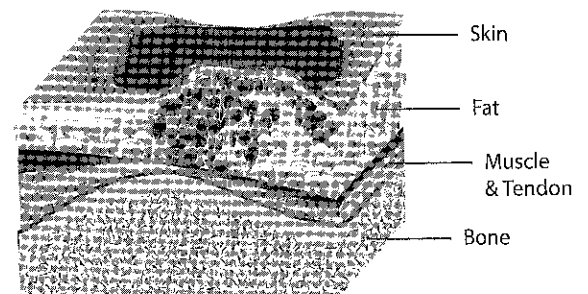
Stage 1



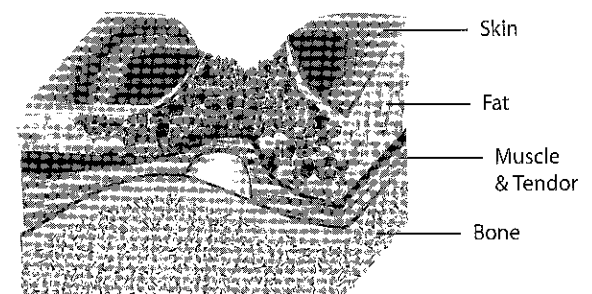
Stage 2



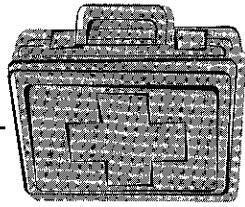
Stage 3



Stage 4



Go to your worksheet and answer question #5.

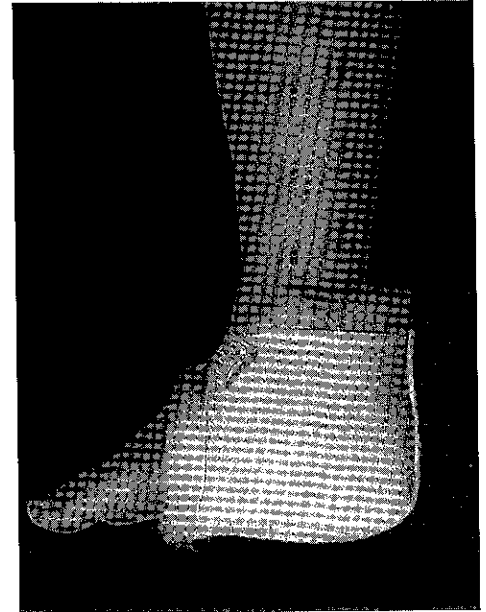


Pressure Sores

How are pressure sores treated?

The following four things may help pressure sores to heal:

- ▶ Relieving the pressure that caused the sore by using pillows, special foam cushions, and sheepskin to reduce the pressure.
- ▶ Treat the sore based on the stage of the ulcer. The person's health care professional will give you specific treatment and care instructions.
- ▶ Improve the person's nutritional intake. Good nutrition is important because it helps the body heal the sore. If the person does not get enough calories, protein and other nutrients, their body won't be able to heal, no matter how carefully the pressure sore is taken care of.
- ▶ Keep the area clean and free of dead tissue. The person's health care provider will give you specific instructions.



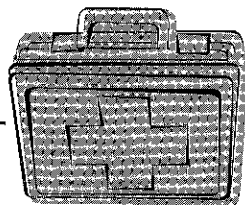
As a pressure sore heals, it slowly gets smaller and less fluid drains from it. New tissue starts growing at the bottom of the sore. This tissue will look light red or pink, and lumpy or shiny. It may take two to four weeks of treatment before you see signs of healing.

How do you reduce the pressure on a sore?

The person should not lie directly on the pressure sore. Use foam pads, pillows, and sheepskin to take pressure off the sore. Special mattresses, mattress covers, foam wedges or seat cushions can help support the person in bed or in a chair to help reduce or relieve the pressure.

When the person is sitting in a chair or wheelchair, have the person sit upright and as straight as possible. An upright, straight position will allow the person to move more easily and help prevent new sores. If the person can not move by themselves, assist the person to another position at least every one to two hours, more often if possible.

Pressure Sores



What are the signs of an infected pressure sore?

Signs that a pressure sore may be infected:

- ▶ Thick yellow or green pus
- ▶ A foul odor
- ▶ Red and tender
- ▶ Warm and swollen

Pressure sores that become infected heal more slowly and can spread a dangerous infection to the rest of the person's body. Signs that the infection may have spread include the following:

- ▶ Fever or chills
- ▶ Mental confusion or difficulty concentrating
- ▶ Weakness

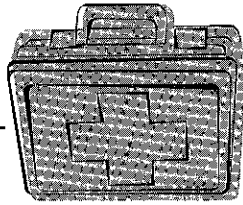


 Go to your worksheet and answer question #6.

How can we help prevent pressure sores?



Preventing pressure sores is much easier than trying to heal them. The most important step in preventing pressure sores is to avoid prolonged pressure on any one part of the body by repositioning the person frequently. A person at risk of developing pressure sores should be placed on a pressure reducing surface. Such surfaces would include foam, air, alternating air, gel, or water mattresses or pads. Cleanliness and good skin care are essential for the person. Assist the person to check their body everyday for red spots, color changes or other signs of sores. Pay special attention to the pressure points we discussed earlier where sores are most likely to occur.



Pressure Sores

Is good nutrition important for the healing of pressure sores?

Good nutrition is vital because it helps the person's body heal the sore. If the person doesn't get enough calories, protein and other nutrients, their body won't be able to heal, no matter how carefully they take care of the sore.

Pressure sores left untreated or improperly treated can have a devastating effect on a person. By having a basic understanding of how pressure sores develop and how they can be prevented, you will be better equipped to support individuals at risk.



Go to your worksheet and answer questions #7 and #8.

