



PRESSURE ULCER OR INJURY

Pressure ulcers/injuries are also called bed sores, or pressure sores. They can form when your skin and soft tissue press against a harder surface, such as a chair or bed, for a prolonged time. The pressure reduces blood supply to that area. Lack of blood supply causes damage to the skin and soft tissue resulting in pressure ulcer or injury. Pressure ulcers most often develop over bony areas of the body, such as the heels, ankles, hips and tailbone.

Untreated, pressure sores can lead to serious, potentially life-threatening infections. Early intervention and appropriate treatment significantly improves the outcomes and healing rates for pressure ulcers.

Causes

There are four main causes of pressure injuries in adults:

Pressure: Constant pressure on an area of the body resulting in decreased blood flow. Blood flow is important to deliver oxygen to skin and tissues. When blood flow is decreased, the skin and surrounding tissue can be damaged.

Shear: Occurs when a person “slides” on or off surfaces causing damage to the tissue under the skin.

Friction: Occurs when two surfaces rub against each other, for example, when the skin continually rubs against clothing or bed sheets.

Moisture: Excessive moisture caused by incontinence can damage the skin.

Risk Factors

Factors that may put you at risk of developing a pressure injury:

- Unable to move self or change position
- Spend a lot of time in one position with minimal movement
- Urinary or fecal incontinence
- Poor nutrition (low protein levels)
- Dehydration
- Decreased sensation in a part of the body
- History of long-term steroid therapy
- Overweight or underweight

Treatment and Care

After a thorough evaluation, which may include diagnostic testing, your provider will discuss a treatment plan with you. Treatments vary based on individuals, but may include:

- Appropriate off-loading strategies/ techniques to relieve the pressure
- Special dressings to absorb drainage
- Prevention and treatment of infection

Pressure reduction techniques to relieve the pressure and optimize the blood flow for healing may include a pressure reduction surface or therapy mattress / wheelchair cushion.

If you notice any of the following symptoms, notify your provider immediately:

- Unusual changes in skin color or texture
- Swelling
- Pus-like draining
- An area of skin that feels cooler or warmer to the touch than other areas
- Painful or itchy skin (without a rash) or a burning sensation on your skin
- Blister, abrasion or tenderness over the bony prominence

Nutrients Needed for Enhanced Wound Healing

- **Calories.** You need about 15 calories per pound of body weight each day. For a 150-pound person, this adds up to 2,250 calories a day during wound healing. (150 x 15 = 2250. Multiply your weight by 15 to get a close calculation of your daily needs)
- **Protein.** Very important through all phases of healing, protein is required to promote new tissue growth. It is vital that you get adequate protein for wound healing to occur. The average sedentary man requires about 56 grams a day and a women approximately 46 grams. (Quick reference: a 3 ounce chicken breast contains about 21 grams and one cup of dried beans contains about 16 grams). Check your labels and add up the protein!
- **Fluids.** You need to drink extra fluids to help your kidneys process the extra protein and replace fluids lost from your wounds. If you have heavily-draining wounds, you will need to drink even more. You need about .5 fluid ounces per pound per day. A 150-person would need 75 ounces a day during wound healing. Choose your fluids wisely and avoid sodas and sweetened drinks. Sugar has been shown to decrease the activity of your “infection fighting” cells, which will put you at higher risk for infection.
- **Vitamin C.** You need 1,000 - 2,000 mg per day during the healing stage. It is best to obtain vitamin C from natural sources such as fruits and vegetables. Avoid drinking too much juice because you will be missing out on the fiber, while possibly adding too much sugar. Eat the apple, if possible, versus drinking the apple juice.
- **Vitamin A.** A dose of 20,000-25,000 IU per day is typically recommended for 10 days. This vitamin should only be taken only as recommended by your provider. Vitamin A may decrease the negative effects of any steroid treatment you are receiving for wound healing.
- **Vitamin B-complex.** Vitamin B complex helps to metabolize carbohydrates and proteins to produce energy, which is essential for cell growth. It also aids in the prevention of anemia (thereby increasing the oxygen supply to your wound).
- **Trace minerals.** You need a trace of zinc, iron and copper for healing difficult wounds.
- **Arginine.** This amino acid has been shown to enhance healing in certain people.

For more information, call:

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