



What You Need to Know about Pressure Sores

A Fact Sheet for Patients and Their Family Members

Pressure ulcers (also called “bed sores” or “decubitus ulcers”) are skin wounds caused by pressure from lying or sitting in one position too long. Pressure ulcers most often occur in bony areas such as the heels, elbows, or buttocks. They can be mild or severe. Millions of people get pressure ulcers each year.

Here are some ways that doctors and nurses can help prevent pressure ulcers:

- Find out which patients are at greatest risk for pressure ulcers. This includes people who spend a lot of time in the bed or a chair, or people who do not eat well.
- Each day, look all over a person’s body for any skin changes or sores.
- Keep patients as clean and dry as possible. This is needed because soiled or wet skin increases the chance that a person will get pressure ulcers.
- Make sure patients eat a healthy diet and drink enough water.
- Decrease pressure on a person’s skin. Remind patients to shift position often when they are sitting or lying down. For patients who cannot move, put them in a new position at least once every two hours. If needed, give patients a special mattress that helps prevent pressure ulcers.

How family members can help

Ask the nurses and doctors these questions:

- Is our family member (patient) at risk for pressure ulcers?
- What type of food and how much water should our family member eat and drink?
- What are you doing to decrease pressure on his or her skin?

You can learn more about pressure ulcer prevention as it relates to the 5 Million Lives Campaign by going to www.ihl.org

The 5 Million Lives Campaign is a voluntary initiative of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement to protect patients from five million incidents of medical harm over the next two years (December 2006 – December 2008).

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