

## Pressure Ulcer Prevention

Pressure ulcers are also known as decubitus ulcers, bed sores, and pressure sores. Prevention of pressure ulcers is very important. Once a pressure area has developed that area is then more at risk of a second pressure ulcer developing. Pressure ulcers can happen very quickly, within 10 to 20 minutes in some cases. They can be very painful and costly both emotionally and financially. Pressure ulcers are easy to prevent but difficult to treat.

### What is a pressure ulcer?

A pressure ulcer occurs when the skin and tissue underneath breaks down. This may be caused by constant pressure on the one area. The first sign of a pressure ulcer is a redness of the skin. This can then develop into a broken skin area that looks like an abrasion, pimple or blister. Eventually, if unchecked the pressure ulcer can destroy the underlying tissue, tendon, joint and muscle to leave an open wound down to the bone.

### Risk Factors

A number of factors influence the likelihood of developing a pressure ulcer:

- Inability to regularly change position – immobility, being restricted to either sitting or lying down increases pressure especially over bony areas.
- Dietary intake – dehydration, oedema, weight loss or obesity and poor diet affects the health of the skin.
- Moisture – skin remaining damp due to perspiration, urine and faeces can contribute to the breakdown of the skin surface.
- Poor circulation – skin receives less oxygen and nutrients leading to skin breakdown.
- Alteration in sensation – may not feel discomfort and pain or the need to change position.

### WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT PRESSURE AREAS

- Check daily for reddened areas of skin, especially on these areas ear, elbow, iliac crest, hip (trochanter), knee, toe. Seek advice from a health professional.
- Change position regularly. This helps oxygen and nutrients in blood flow back into the cells of the skin, avoiding skin and tissue death.
- Avoid stretching or pulling on the skin, especially when moving from one place to another or when changing position. Avoid creases, folds and crumbs in the clothing and on the sitting or lying surface, as they can cause high pressure points.
- Spread the person's weight evenly over the largest area possible. This will help to disperse the pressure. Use a suitable pressure reducing cushion, mattress or protector to help achieve this. Seek advice from a health professional.
- Keep the skin clean, dry and in good condition. Use "breathable fabrics near the skin. Seek professional advice on managing incontinence where appropriate.
- Ensure adequate nutrition and fluid intake. This will give the skin the best chance to be healthy.

### NEED TO KNOW MORE?

Telephone, fax or e-mail your enquiry to obtain further information from one of the therapists about products. Alternatively, you can make an appointment to trial the equipment at our display centres or through our outreach service. Please phone LifeTec for further details.

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