

# St Gemma's Hospice Information Sheet

## How can you help to prevent pressure ulcers?

### What is a pressure ulcer?

When you sit in a chair or lay in a bed and move less you may notice that your skin becomes uncomfortable or even painful. When this happens you should move or change your position to stop that uncomfortable feeling.

Unfortunately, however many people are unable to take this step to move position by themselves. This may be due to illness, extreme tiredness, injury, medications or not being able to feel when the skin is becoming uncomfortable.

Skin is fed by our blood supply. If we stay in one position for too long the blood can no longer get to certain points in our body such as in the diagrams below:

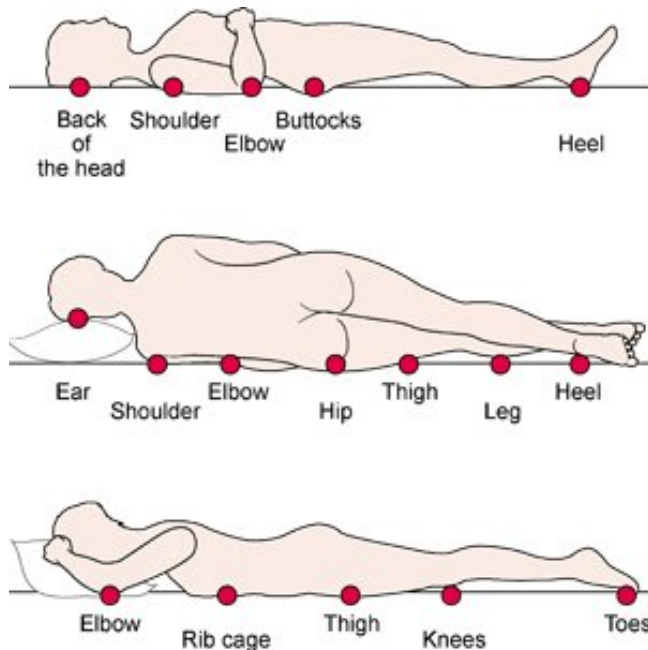


Diagram showing the areas of the body at risk of pressure sores when lying down

© CancerHelp UK  
Original diagram by the Tissue Viability Society

If blood supply is affected skin can be damaged or die. This can lead to what is known as a pressure ulcer. This used to be known as a bed sore.

Pressure ulcers can also be caused by medical devices or when there is a lot rubbing or friction on a person's skin. Sadly, pressure ulcers are very common and many people may have a family member or friend who has experienced having one or more.

## Am I likely to get a pressure ulcer?

As an In-Patient at St Gemma's Hospice a nurse will ask to inspect your skin on the day you are admitted to the ward. This is so that we can check to see how your skin is doing, to check if you have a pressure ulcer already or to see if your skin is particularly at risk. We may ask to continue to check your skin on a daily basis so that we can monitor for any changes.

We will also ask your permission to help you move your position every few hours if you need it and this may also include at times overnight. Some people have a higher risk of developing pressure ulcers because of spending lots of time in a bed or chair, because of illness or medical condition, due to pain or not being able to eat or drink much.

The nurses and doctors at St Gemma's will assess your individual needs and aim to help to prevent you from getting a pressure ulcer. You may be given a special mattress or chairs or cushions to reduce the amount of pressure on parts of your body. Sometimes pressure ulcers cannot be prevented.

If you have an existing pressure ulcer or you develop a pressure ulcer, treatment may include medication and special dressings. The doctors and nurses will aim to help stop any other ulcers from developing if this happens.

## How can I help to reduce my risk of getting a pressure ulcer?

You can help to stop pressure ulcers by taking the following actions if you can:

- Make big or small changes to your position as often as you can.
- Speak to your doctor or nurse if you are worried about how much you are able to move or about getting a pressure ulcer.
- Eat and drink as much as you can tolerate as this can help the skin to be as healthy as possible.
- Ask for assistance if you feel that you need it especially for skin cleansing, for your bladder and bowels or if you feel very sweaty.



## References:

National Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel - How can you stop pressure injuries? [www.npuap.org](http://www.npuap.org)

Images: National Tissue Viability Society

**For more information please visit [www.st-gemma.co.uk](http://www.st-gemma.co.uk)**