



**Lakeridge  
Health**

Lakeridge Health

# Pressure Injuries

How to keep skin healthy and prevent pressure injuries

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### **What is a pressure injury?**

Pressure injuries (also known as bed sores or pressure ulcers) develop when skin is damaged by pressure. This can happen if someone spends most of the day in a chair or bed. Pressure injuries can be painful, hard to heal and may lead to serious infections.

Pressure Injuries may also develop from medical devices that rest against the skin such as catheters, nasal prongs, tubes, and/or splints.

This can also happen when someone slides down in bed or in their chair. This happens most often during repositioning when bed sheets are pulled and moved, creating friction and tears on the skin.

### **What are the signs and symptoms of pressure injury?**

Pressure injuries can become painful. Some people may tell you they have pain or discomfort in a certain area after being in the same position for a long time.

Common signs of a pressure injury are:

- Changes in skin colour, turning red, purple or dark
- Pain or discomfort
- Blisters



## Stages of a pressure injury

Pressure injuries are measured in stages. Below is a description of what a pressure injury may look like at each stage.

### Stage 1

Red and non-blanchable, meaning it does not turn white when pressed. This is a sign that not enough blood supply is getting to that area. Stage 1 pressure injuries may not appear as described; however, they may appear to be different in colour from surrounding areas. For this reason, they may be harder to spot. Listen to a person's verbal complaints of pain and discomfort.

### Stage 2

Red and the skin will open. It may also look like a fluid filled blister.

### Stage 3

The injured area will be deeper and may show fatty tissue.

### Stage 4

Deep wounds that involve muscle, bone, tendons, ligaments, and sometimes organs.

### Unstageable

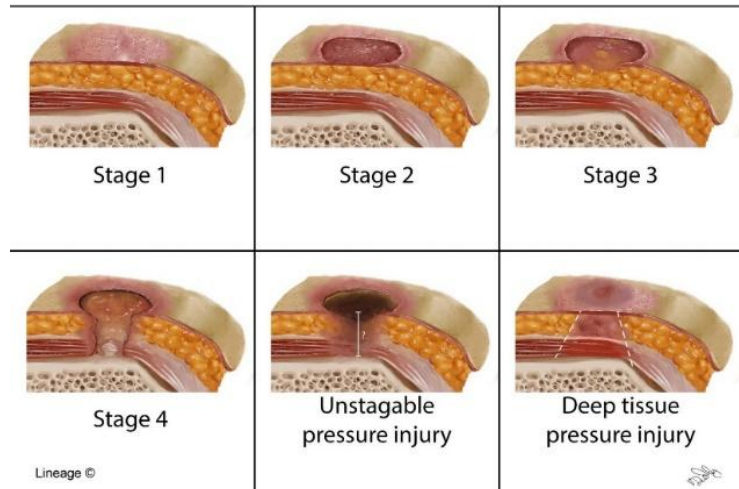
If there is black tissue covering the pressure injury, it is referred to as unstageable.

A deep purple can be indicative of a deep tissue pressure injury. Meaning there is damage to the tissue under the skin, however it is not yet an open wound.

## Recognizing Pressure Injuries in Darker Skin Tones

Pressure injuries may not appear red in darker skin tones. Instead, look for:

### Pressure Ulcer



- Color changes: Affected skin may appear darker than the surrounding area, with hues of blue, purple, or gray rather than red.
- Texture differences: The skin may feel firm, boggy (soft), or swollen compared to surrounding areas.
- Temperature changes: The area may feel warmer or cooler than the surrounding skin.
- Pain or discomfort: Individuals may report pain, itching, or a tingling sensation even when no visible injury is apparent.
- If uncertain about skin changes, use the "press and release" method—press on the skin and observe if the color lightens briefly. If it does not blanch or changes persist, seek medical advice.

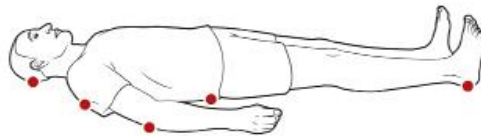


## Where do pressure injuries occur most?

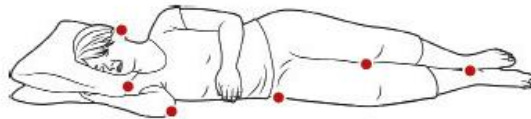
The most common areas are shoulders, spine, coccyx (tailbone), elbows, and heels.

The red dots below show where pressure injuries commonly develop.

When lying  
on your back



When lying  
on your side



When sitting in bed



When sitting in a chair



## What are the risk factors?

Risk factors are the things that can increase getting a pressure injury.

You are more likely to get a pressure injury if you:

- Have difficulty moving and cannot easily change positions
- Cannot feel pain or pressure on your skin
- Have skin that is often wet from sweat, urine or bowel movements
- Are not eating well or drinking enough
- Have poor blood flow
- Are an older adult with thin, fragile skin
- Have medical devices against your skin
- Have had a pressure injury before

These risk factors may also be impacted by other conditions such as diabetes, heart failure, renal failure, stroke, cancer, and pneumonia.

## How are pressure injuries prevented?

When you come to the hospital, a member of the healthcare team will check your skin and assess your risk of developing a pressure injury. The nurse will share this assessment with you, your Essential Partner-in-Care (EPC) and other members of the health care team. Together, you will plan care to keep your skin healthy.

There are tools available to help prevent pressure injuries. All mattresses on the hospital beds at Lakeridge Health are appropriate to manage stage 1 and 2 pressure injuries. However, there are other aids that can support the prevention and care of a pressure injury.

Below are pictures of what these aids may look like.

|                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Heel protector boot</p>                   | <p>Wedge pillow</p>                                    |
| <p>Air mattress, to distribute weight.</p>  | <p>Roho cushion for seats, to distribute weight.</p>  |

**What healthcare team members are involved in the prevention and care of a pressure injury?**

If you are at high risk of getting a pressure injury, you may need one of the following healthcare team members to support you. Each of these team members has special knowledge and skills that will help prevent and care for a pressure injury.

- Nurses
- Dietitians
- Physicians or Nurse Practitioners
- Wound care specialists
- Occupational therapists
- Physiotherapists.

### Tips for Prevention and Early Detection

- Perform **daily skin checks** in **good lighting** to spot early skin changes.
- Pay close attention to **bony areas**, including the **heels, tailbone, elbows, and shoulders**.
- Use **moisturizer** to prevent **dry, cracked skin**, which can increase the risk of injury.
- Consider **offloading pressure** with **heel protectors, cushions, and frequent repositioning**.
- Encourage **movement and repositioning** every **two hours** when in bed and every **30–60 minutes** when seated.

### How can I help someone prevent getting a pressure injury?

- Help to reposition the person every 2 hours.
  - It is best to keep the head of the bed at an angle lower than 30 degrees.
  - When lying on their back place a pillow under the calves to raise the heels off the bed.
  - When on their side, place a wedge or pillow under one side of the back to lift the spine and one shoulder off the bed. Use another pillow between the knees.
  - When in a sitting position, encourage the person to shift their weight from side to side and always provide footrests.

- Wheelchair users may use Roho cushions to help ease pressure.
- Ensure the person is consuming enough protein and fluids such as water. Proper nutrition is important when preventing pressure injuries. You can ask the nurse or dietitian if you have any questions about this.
- Keep the skin hydrated. Dry skin can cause cracks and increase the risk for pressure injury. Use moisturizing cream on areas of dry skin frequently.
- Keep the areas dry. Excess moisture can weaken the skin and increase the risk of a pressure injury. Use barrier creams in areas that are frequently wet.
- Use pH balanced cleansers that are soap-free and do not need rinsing. They are more natural and will not strip away the skin's natural oil barrier. Avoid soaps with fragrance, and exfoliants.
- Check the patient for signs of pressure injuries each visit. Look for any redness, purple, or dark discoloration forming. Check for blisters and feel to see if the skin is becoming firm, warm, or cool. If they have any pain or discomfort, these could be signs of pressure injury development. Let the healthcare team know immediately if you notice any of these signs or symptoms.
- Utilize the 3 C's.
  - Communicate and Collaborate: advocate for a meeting to be held with the healthcare team to discuss prevention and care. If any signs of pressure injury development are seen, communicate with the healthcare team right away.
  - Be a Champion: educate yourself on the issue and help implement prevention strategies. Visit the patient often to help reposition and assess. Take pictures and videos of the areas to show the healthcare team.
  - Provide Comfort: Bring clean clothes and items from home such as blankets, pictures, and favourite items.
- Most importantly, if the person wants to get up, encourage it and ask for assistance. Movement will help blood flow, decreasing the risk of pressure injury.

## **What happens if a pressure injury develops?**

Nurses and staff are trained to treat stage 1 and 2 pressure injuries. Pressure injuries at stage 3 and above will require an assessment from a wound care specialist. They will also receive a special air mattress to distribute the patients' weight. It is important to maintain cleanliness once a pressure injury has formed. The nurse will change dressings according to policy and date the bandage. Ask the nurse how often the dressing should be changed so you can help communicate if it needs to be changed.

## **What are the complications of a pressure injury?**

Common complications of pressure injuries are discomfort, pain, bleeding, infection, and in severe cases, death.

## **What happens if a pressure injury becomes infected?**

Infected pressure injuries are serious. Pressure injuries may become infected at any time for multiple reasons. Speak with the healthcare team if you have any questions or concerns. Signs of infection are pus, green or yellow discharge, a foul smell, redness, fever, or swelling. It is best to keep the pressure injury clean and free from excess pressure.

## **Care giver burden**

Caregivers of people with pressure injuries are at higher risk of developing care giver burden due to continuous assessments and care. Make sure to take time for yourself. Access resources for support such as the Ontario Caregiver Organization.

If you are the Essential Partner-in-Care for a person, visit the Lakeridge Health website at [www.lh.ca](http://www.lh.ca) to learn more about how you can best support them.

## References

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