



# Preventing pressure ulcers

## Information for patients and carers

### What is a pressure ulcer?

Pressure ulcers are often referred to as pressure sores or bedsores. An ulcer is damage to an area of the skin and the tissue beneath it. This can be painful and may lead to a longer stay in hospital.

### Where on the body can you get pressure ulcers?

All areas of the body are at risk of pressure ulcer development. However, some areas are more at risk than others. Ulcers are more likely to develop over bony parts of the body that don't have much fat to protect them.

The most common areas are on the heels, hips and buttocks. Other areas at risk of pressure ulcers include the base of the spine, the shoulder blades, the backs and sides of the knees, and the back of the head.

### What causes pressure ulcers to develop?

Normally, when we are well, we are able to move ourselves to prevent pressure on vulnerable areas, such as buttocks and heels.

For various reasons, you may be unable to move yourself to prevent the skin from becoming damaged. This can result in the skin being squashed and the blood supply to that area of the body being cut off.

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If this happens, the area will be starved of oxygen and nutrients; this may then lead to a pressure ulcer.

### **What you can do to help avoid pressure ulcers**

- Change your position regularly
- Wear clothing that is not too tight and does not rub your skin. This also applies to socks and shoes
- Ensure shoes/slippers are in good condition; run down heels can cause friction and blistering to the heels
- Avoid clothing that has thick seams, zips, studs or buttons; these can press into your skin

If you are unable to move yourself, staff will help you to change position.

### **Please tell the nurses if you have any ...**

- Discomfort, pain, soreness or numbness
- Change in skin colour

... Especially if this is in any of the risk areas mentioned above.

It is most important to eat well and not to miss meals during your stay in hospital – this will help you to maintain a healthy weight. Nutritional snacks are available. We will monitor your weight during your stay by weighing you weekly. If you have any questions regarding the foods you eat please ask to speak to the Dietitian.

### **Assessing the risk**

When you are admitted to hospital, staff will assess your risk of developing a pressure ulcer.

You and your relatives are encouraged to inform the nurses if you have any of these risk factors:

- limited mobility
  - poor nutrition
  - incontinence
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## How are potential pressure ulcers avoided?

Nursing staff will encourage you to move regularly, if you are able, and will help you to change position if needed.

This trust uses the nationally recognised 5 step approach to preventing pressure ulcers called SSKIN.

- S**urface choice
- S**kin monitoring
- K**eeP moving
- I**ncontinence care
- N**utrition and hydration


Please ask the nurses if you would like more information about SSKIN.

The Trust has invested in the AtmosAir mattress system which has been specifically designed to assist in the prevention and treatment of pressure damage. All inpatient areas have as standard AtmosAir 4000 pressure relieving mattresses in place; upgraded mattresses are available for patients considered to be at high risk of pressure damage.

### Further information and advice may be obtained from:

The Trust **Tissue Viability Nurse Specialists** have had specific training in the area of pressure ulcer prevention and treatment. Please ask the ward staff to contact the Tissue Viability Nurse Specialist if you would like further advice.

**NHS 111**  
**NHS Choices online**

 111  
[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

**National Institute for  
Clinical Excellence (NICE)**

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

**European Pressure Ulcer  
Advisory Panel (EPUAP)**

[www.epuap.org](http://www.epuap.org)

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**MTW NHS Trust is committed to making its patient information accessible in a range of languages and formats. If you need this leaflet in another language or format please ask one of your clinical care team or the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). We will do our best to arrange this.**

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust welcomes all forms of feedback from our service users. If the standard of service you have received from the Trust does not meet your expectations, we want to hear from you. Please speak with the ward manager or the nurse in charge in the first instance, or you can contact the **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** on:

**Telephone:** ☎ 01622 224960 or ☎ 01892 632953

**Email:** [mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net](mailto:mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net)

**or visit their office** at either Maidstone or Tunbridge Wells Hospital between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

You can be confident that your care will not be affected by highlighting any areas of concern or making a complaint. The Trust will retain a record of your contact, which is held separately to any medical records. If you are acting on behalf of a patient, we may need to obtain the patient's consent in order to protect patient confidentiality. More information on PALS or making a complaint can be found on the Trust's website: [www.mtw.nhs.uk](http://www.mtw.nhs.uk) or pick up a leaflet from main reception.

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