What is a Pressure Ulcer and How is it Caused?
A pressure ulcer is an injury to the skin and the tissue below it. It is caused by pressure, rubbing or friction. It happens when a person sits or lies down for a long time without moving. Pressure ulcers form when the skin is pressed against a bone. Pressure ulcers can cause pain and scarring. They might drain a little or a lot. They can get in the way of daily living. Pressure ulcers can cause a person to stay in the hospital.

Where can Pressure Ulcers Form?
Pressure ulcers can form all over the body. They are often found on the back, hipbone, and heels. Those in wheelchairs may have ulcers form behind the knees and ankles. They also may form behind the shoulder blades, elbows, back of the head, and spine.

How can I Prevent a Pressure Ulcer in a Family Member or Myself?
Encourage good nutrition. Drink plenty of water. Keep your ulcer clean from urine and stool. It will help your ulcer heal. Perform the wound care the doctor ordered.

Call your doctor if you see any of the following:
- Increase in redness
- Drainage that smells bad or begins to change color
- Swelling
- Temperature over 101
- A new wound

How can I Prevent Pressure Ulcers on a Family Member or Myself?
- A lotion can be used on dry areas. Do not put lotion between the toes. Do not rub or massage lotion into reddened areas.
How can I Prevent Pressure Ulcers on a Family Member or Myself? (cont’d)

- Areas of the body should be looked at daily. Pay attention to red areas. Pay attention to open areas. Look at skin covering bony areas.
- Protect skin from dryness or too much moisture.
- Apply moisturizers to keep the skin from getting too dry.
- Use pads to absorb wetness away from the skin.
- Clean the skin as soon as possible after soiling from urine or stool.
- Apply barrier creams to protect skin from urine, stool, or drainage.
- Change position at least every one to two hours.
- Do not drag the body across the sheets or pull on the skin.
- Ask your doctor or nurse to show you how to make and use a “draw” sheet.
- Keep body parts from rubbing together by using pillows or wedges. For example, between the knees and ankle bones.
- Use a special mattress or cushion to help lower pressure.
- Do not use donut-shaped cushions when sitting.
- Eat a well balanced diet that gives you enough calories and protein.
- Ask your doctor about nutritional supplements.
- Off load.

Off-Loading – What Is It?

Off-loading is placing the body so that there is no pressure on the ulcer.

Some ways to offload are:

- Do not rest or lay on the wound.
- Use a special bed, or chair pad.
- Use a wheelchair at all times when ordered by your doctor.
- Wear special shoes or casts at all times when ordered by your doctor.
- Do not walk or put pressure on a wound if it is on the foot.
- Change positions at lease every two hours when in bed.
- When in bed keep heels off of the bed. Place a pillow under the legs to suspend the heels.
- Do not place pillows under the knees.
- Lift your body. Do not scoot.
- Keep body parts from rubbing together by using pillows or wedges. For example, between the knees and ankle bones.
- Shift your weight every 15 minutes when you are out of bed.
- If you cannot move on your own ask your caregiver to shift your weight every hour.
- Do not sit on a donut shaped cushion or pillows.
Do Pressure Ulcers Heal?  
What Can I do to Make a Pressure Ulcer Heal Faster?

Pressure ulcers can heal. Healing an ulcer requires hard work and dedication. A wound may not start to heal in two weeks. It may not completely heal in six weeks. These wounds may need special wound care. It can take a team of health care workers working together, including you and your caregiver. Tell your doctor about your health and medications. You and your doctor can develop a plan to make your ulcer heal.

What Can a Treatment Plan Include?

Treatment for pressure ulcers includes the same steps to prevent them. Care includes keeping pressure off the ulcer. A good diet is important. The plan may include cleaning the ulcer and removing dead skin. You may place a dressing or bandage on the ulcer to protect the area while it heals.

Your doctor will give you instructions on how to:
• Care for the ulcer
• Eat well
• Remove pressure
• Offload

Call the Wound Healing Center if you notice:
• Increased pain at the wound site
• Redness or swelling around the wound or spreading away from the wound
• Foul odor coming from the wound
• Any change in color or amount of drainage from the wound
• Fever or chills; nausea or vomiting

What if the Ulcer Does Not Heal?

Your doctor may start other treatments. You may require special devices to help heal the ulcer or surgery may be done to help repair the ulcer. In most cases, if proper treatment plans are followed, healing will take place.

Where can I get More Information about Pressure Ulcers?

National Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel  
12100 Sunset Hills Road  
Suite 130  
Reston, Virginia, 20190  
Phone: (703) 464-4849  
Web site: www.npuap.org

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