

Preventing pressure ulcers



You'll be lying or sitting for a long time during your hospital stay. You could develop pressure ulcers (also called bed sores). This fact sheet explains how to prevent them.

What is a pressure ulcer?

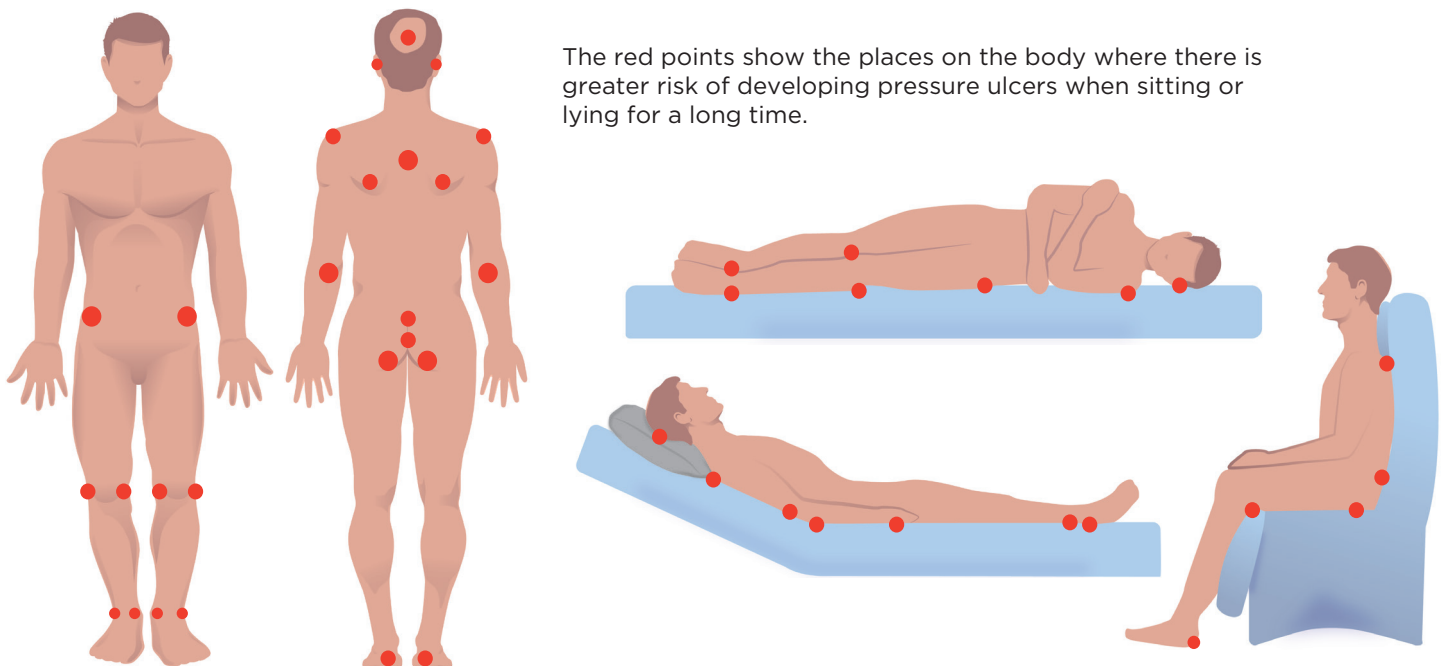
Long-term pressure on the skin can crush blood vessels. It prevents oxygen and nutrients carried by the blood from reaching the tissues in that area. These tissues become damaged and may eventually die. People at risk can develop a pressure ulcer within 2 to 6 hours.

This type of wound often forms where a bone sticks out from the body, such as the heels, buttocks, elbows, and hips.

What complications can this cause?

Pressure ulcers can:

- cause severe pain
- prevent you from moving as usual (such as having trouble walking)
- make your hospital stay longer
- reduce your quality of life
- cause a serious and potentially life-threatening infection



What puts someone at risk for this type of wound?

- > Staying still for a long time
- > Difficulty moving (for example, due to a disability or surgery)
- > Little or no sensation in a limb or part of the body
- > Problems with blood circulation
- > High blood sugar levels (diabetes)
- > Leaking urine or stool (incontinence)
- > Poor appetite or low protein diet
- > Dry skin
- > Being thin or overweight

The older we get, the more fragile our skin becomes and the more likely we are to develop these wounds.

What can be done to prevent pressure ulcers?

The best way to reduce the risk is to move as often as possible and to keep the skin clean and dry.

Also, follow the recommendations below while in the hospital. You may be advised to continue following them when you return home.

POSITION

In bed:

- Change position every 2 hours.
- Put a pillow between your knees when lying on your side.
- When you're not eating, don't keep your head too high up, to avoid sliding and rubbing your skin on the mattress.
- Put a pillow under your calves to keep your heels from touching the mattress.



In a chair:

- Change position every 15 minutes (for example, stand up, lean forward, bend sideways).
- Always keep your feet flat on the floor, your buttocks firmly back in the seat, and your back straight up against the backrest.
- Avoid having any folds in your clothing under your buttocks when sitting.

SKIN

- Apply a moisturizing lotion to your skin every day.



- Never massage any red spot or any area where the skin has changed colour.

INCONTINENCE

If you suffer from this:

- apply a barrier cream to protect the skin around the anus and on the buttocks
- ask for help to change your incontinence briefs when they get wet or dirty

DIET

Eat at least 3 meals a day and drink between 1.5 and 2 litres of liquid per day, unless otherwise advised by your doctor.

Eat protein-rich foods (for example, meat, legumes, dairy products, eggs). See the health fact sheet [Eating protein-rich, energy-dense foods](#).

If you eat very little, ask to have nutritional supplements added to your meals (such as Ensure or Boost).





TOBACCO

Try not to smoke during your hospital stay. Tobacco increases the risk of pressure ulcers and slows healing. Discuss this with your care team. There are resources to help you stop smoking.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Walk as soon as you have the opportunity and ability, according to your doctor’s advice. You can ask the care staff for help, if needed.

A physiotherapist or occupational therapist can be requested to assist you, if needed.

See the health fact sheet [*Rester actif à l’hôpital – Mieux récupérer grâce aux exercices.*](#) (French only)

How can my care team help me?

Don’t hesitate to ask them to:

- assess your risk for pressure ulcers
- check you often for skin that has changed colour, redness, or sores
- change your position in bed
- help you to sit in a chair for your meals
- place a pillow under or between your legs



If you’re at risk, ask your care team to provide you with the following equipment during your hospital stay:

- > a special mattress for the bed
- > a special cushion for the chair

Advise your care team at once if:

- > you have less sensation in any part of your body
- > you have pain in a place where a bone sticks out from the body (e.g. elbow, seat, heel, hip, etc.)

Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

You can ask your care team for help or information at any time. If needed, they can refer you to another professional.



USEFUL RESOURCES

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our website chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante



Questions

The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l’Université de Montréal chumontreal.qc.ca

