

# Pressure injuries

Information for patients and their loved ones



Hôpital universitaire  
Academic Hospital

## What is a pressure injury?

A pressure injury is damaged skin that can extend to the muscles and bones. Pressure injuries were previously referred to as “bedsores” or “pressure sores.”



## Who is at risk of developing pressure injuries?

All patients who depend on others to get around are at risk of developing a pressure injury, but there are many other risk factors, such as: dehydration, poor diet, fever, incontinence, depression, confusion, advanced or premature age, decrease or loss of sensation (particularly in the feet).

## How do you know if you are developing a pressure injury?

The first sign of a pressure injury is redness that does not go away when you change position. Pressure injuries can cause the skin to open.

Pressure injuries are most likely to develop on areas of the body where bones are located right under the skin's surface, such as the heels, the lower back, hips and ankles.

## What are the best positions to adopt?

When you are not eating, the head of the adapted bed should never exceed a 30° angle, whether you are lying on your back or on your side.

When lying on your side, your body should form a 30° angle with the mattress. To help maintain this angle, a pillow or cushion can be placed behind your back. This angle prevents too much pressure from being exerted on the shoulder, hip and coccyx bones (the lower back). The lower back should be as little as possible in direct contact with the mattress.



## What are the positions to avoid?



Sitting up in bed should be avoided, because this puts too much pressure on the lower back. In this position, you have a tendency to slip down on the mattress, which causes invisible damage to your skin. This can lead to pressure injuries.

If a reclining chair is available, recline the backrest in order to reduce pressure on the lower back and use a footrest to support your legs. But watch out for the part of the foot that touches the footrest. If you cannot recline the backrest, sit up in the straightest position possible, with your feet resting on the floor.

Ideally, you should sit in a chair for all meals and change position frequently, if your condition allows for this.

Most patients who are in bed should change their position every two hours or, if they are in a chair, every 30 minutes. This frequency can be increased depending on the patient's condition. This is a crucial intervention in preventing the onset of pressure injuries.

## How can you make sure to change position often?

If you are able to move on your own, you should get up and change position as often as possible. If you cannot change position on your own, someone can help you.

## How can you reduce the risk of a pressure injury?

- Whether you are in a chair or bed, you must change position frequently. This is important. Even if an occupational therapist (professional specializing in adapting the patient's environment by providing the necessary aids to maintain activities of daily living) has installed a special mattress, you must continue to change position as often as you can. This is an essential part of prevention!
- Keep your skin clean by using mild unscented soap, and do not scrub hard on bony areas.
- Use a hydrating lotion every day.
- Examine your skin regularly.
- If you suffer from incontinence, avoid exposing your skin to humidity for long periods.
- Stay active (walk to the bathroom and along the corridor), if you do not have any medical restrictions.
- Drink lots of liquids and eat well, especially proteins (while respecting the advice of your physician).

## How can I prevent pressure injuries on my heels?

- Keep your heels off the mattress or footrest by using a pillow.
- Wear socks to reduce friction between your skin and the sheets.

713 Montréal Rd. Ottawa ON

T 613.746.4621

[hopitalmontfort.com](http://hopitalmontfort.com)

4100417 (24-02)