PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF **PRESSURE ULCERS**

ST CHRISTOPHER'S

WHAT IS A PRESSURE ULCER?

A pressure ulcer is damage that occurs on the surface and underlying tissues of the skin due to the lack of blood and oxygen supply. You may have known them as pressure sores or bedsores, but they are now called pressure ulcers.

WHAT CAUSES PRESSURE ULCERS?

The most common cause is due to sitting or lying in one position for too long without moving. This can be a combination of:

- **pressure** caused by the weight of your body pressing down on the skin
- **shearing** which can occur if you slide down in the bed or chair and the skin becomes stretched and tears
- **friction** which can occur when a surface rubs the skin, such as when moving in the bed or poorly-fitted clothing.

WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR?

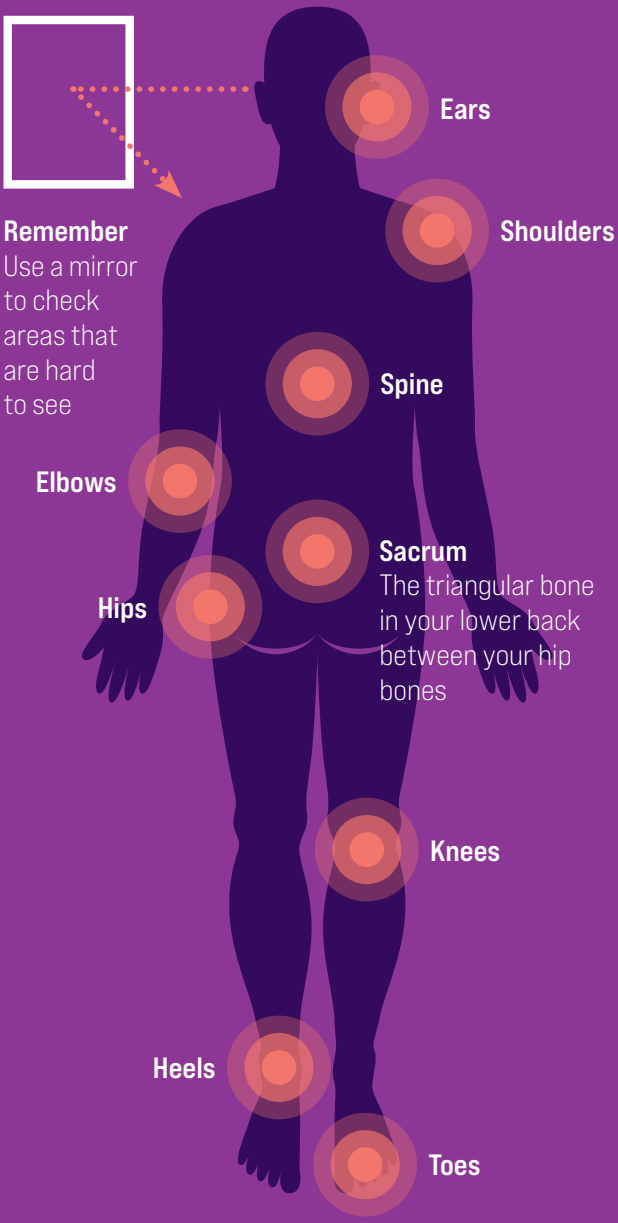
Remember to always keep an eye on the condition of your skin. You may notice some of the following signs:

- Change in the colour of your skin
- A darker patch on dark skins, or red or purple/bluish patches which do not go pale when pressed on lighter skins
- Change in the feel or dryness of your skin
- Blistering to areas where an object has been pressing on the skin
- Hard or swollen areas which may be painful.

Remember that skin awareness is key to early prevention.

ARE THERE ANY COMMON AREAS FOR PRESSURE ULCERS?

The common areas are shown below, but pressure ulcers can occur anywhere on the body. If you are at risk these skin areas need to be checked regularly throughout the day.



Remember
Use a mirror to check areas that are hard to see

AM I AT RISK OF GETTING ONE?

We are all at risk if we are unable to change our position. However, there are also other risk factors that can lead you to developing a pressure ulcer. So please let us know if:

- you're not eating or drinking as much as you did
- you're not moving as much as you used to
- you are sleeping in your chair rather than your bed
- you have any continence problems
- you have reduced feeling or sensation anywhere on your skin
- you think there is a problem with your sleeping position or mattress
- you have had a pressure ulcer before or
- you have any sore areas.

Medicines

Taking some medicines can increase your risk of getting pressure ulcers. For example:

- **Steroids**, such as dexamethasone and prednisolone
- **Anti-inflammatories**, such as ibuprofen and aspirin
- **Anticoagulants** that reduce the ability of the blood to clot, such as warfarin and clexane.

Treatments

- **Radiotherapy** can burn the skin and make it vulnerable to tissue damage
- **Chemotherapy** can cause dryness and thinning of the skin.

Medical devices

It is important to let someone know if you have poorly fitting or painful medical devices, such as an oxygen mask and tubing or a urinary catheter and tubing. A pressure ulcer may develop in only a few hours.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

- If you're able to, try to get up and move regularly. Even standing for 30 seconds will help to relieve some pressure
- Change your position regularly when sitting or lying
- Remove pressure by moving side to side when lying down
- Inspect skin daily using a mirror
- When drying, try to pat your skin dry rather than rubbing
- Moisturise regularly
- Make sure that your shoes, socks and slippers are not too tight.

HOW CAN ST CHRISTOPHER'S HELP?

We are here to help you in trying to prevent pressure ulcers. Let us know if you have any concerns or want more information.

Here are some ways we can help you:

- Conducting a skin assessment to assess any risk factors
- Providing you with skin barrier cream
- Providing you with pressure-relieving equipment such as a special mattress or cushion.

It is really important for your care that the information you give us is as full and accurate as possible.

If you would like this information in a different format, such as audio tape, braille or large print, or in another language, please speak to the Communications team on **020 8768 4500** or email **communications@stchristophers.org.uk**.

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