

## Pressure Sores/Pressure Ulcers

- Pressure sores/ulcers aka bed sores develop when the skin and underlying tissue lacks oxygen and nutrients and the area then begins to die, forming a sore. This condition typically affects elderly and obese people who are unable to change position or shift their weight regularly.
- Usually a pressure sore/ulcer occurs when a person is in a sitting or lying position for an extended period of time.
- The constant pressure against the skin causes decreased blood flow to that area thus the surrounding tissue dies.
- The most common areas for pressure sores/ulcers are the back, back of the head, ankles, heels, elbow, shoulders and hips.

## Common Causes

Pressure sores/ulcers can be caused by four factors:

- **Unrelieved Pressure:** occurs when soft tissue is compressed between the weight of the body and an external surface, such as a bed. The area begins to hurt and then feels numb. When the pressure is too great, the blood supply is blocked, resulting in the breakdown of tissue.
- **Shearing:** usually occurs from sliding, typically when a patient slides down in a bed. With shearing, blood vessels in the skin are torn resulting in reduced blood flow.
- **Maceration:** is when the skin becomes over-hydrated and softens. In illnesses where there is prolonged contact with urine, sweat or other liquids, maceration can occur. Unrelieved pressure in this instance can cause the skin to break down.
- **Friction:** caused when the skin is pulled and dragged, instead of being lifted, over a surface such as a bed. When friction occurs, the top layer of the skin is rubbed causing damage. The softer layer of the skin is then exposed allowing bacteria to enter.

## Generally people at risk for pressure sores/ulcers are:

- The elderly
- Those with fragile skin
- Bedridden individuals or those in a wheelchair
- People with diabetes and/or artery disease, which block certain areas of the body from receiving proper blood flow.
- Mentally disabled individuals, such as Alzheimer's, who may not be aware of the necessary steps toward preventing a sore/ulcer and so may not seek the necessary treatment when a sore/ulcer has formed)

## Prevention

The first step in preventing bed sores is educating oneself. When you take the steps towards educating yourself the prevention will follow. Now that we've discussed what pressure sores are, what causes them and who is likely to get them now you'll be in a better position to help fight off infection. Notable keys to preventing pressure sores/ulcers are:

- Identifying individuals at high risk for pressure sores/ulcers.
- Make certain that patients change their position at least every couple of hours to relieve pressure.
- Use items that can help reduce pressure such as **Med-Mizer** beds
- Encourage daily activity or exercise, including range-of-motion exercises for immobile patients.