

## **SCI Resource of the Month**

### **April 2014: Pressure Sores – Prevention and Care**

#### **What is a pressure sore?**

Pressure sores (also called pressure ulcer, decubitus ulcer, decubiti (plural), bedsore or skin breakdown) are areas of damaged skin caused by staying in one position for too long. They frequently form where your bones are close to your skin. These areas include your ankles, back, elbows and heels. Our skin is sensitive to injury, yet has outstanding self-repair capabilities. A pressure sore involves damage to the skin and underlying tissue. They range from mild to severe.

#### **How do they form?**

Chronic pressure on the skin squeezes tiny blood vessels which deliver the skin with nutrients and oxygen. When blood is absent in the skin for an extended period of time, tissue dies and a pressure sore forms. Moving around in a bed or chair can cause blood vessels to stretch or bend which can lead to pressure sores. Abrasions can occur when a person's skin is pulled across a surface instead of lifted.

Normally, your nerves send messages of pain or discomfort to your brain to let you know when to move to relieve pressure or shift your weight. After injury, messages from the sensory nerves may not reach the brain. With limited or no feeling, you have no warning signs to tell you that something is pressing against your skin causing it harm. Other causes of pressure sores are braces or hard objects that put pressure on your skin.

Paralysis reduces the rate of circulation, thus a reduced amount of oxygen is available to the skin, lowering its resistance. The body tries to compensate by sending more blood to the area, which may cause swelling. A skin sore begins as a red area that may feel hard and/or hot. At this beginning stage, the development is still reversible.

#### **How are they treated?**

A skin sore can mean quite a few weeks, or even months of hospitalization. While first consulting a health care professional, staying off the area and keeping it clean and dry is very important. Complex pressure sores may call for surgery or skin grafting for treatment. All of this can be very inconvenient, taking away valuable time from work, school or family. This is why it is vital to do daily skin checks, preventing their development. Pressure sore treatment is complex because of difficult infections, spasticity, and additional pressure. With attentive care, skin integrity can be maintained.

**Sources:**

- <http://vsearch.nlm.nih.gov/vivisimo/cgi-bin/query-meta?query=pressure+sores&v%3Aproject.nlm-main-website>
- [http://www.christopherreeve.org/site/c.mtKZKgMWKwG/b.4453427/k.F231/Skin\\_Care.htm](http://www.christopherreeve.org/site/c.mtKZKgMWKwG/b.4453427/k.F231/Skin_Care.htm)

**Resource Links:**

- <http://www.npuap.org/>
- <http://www.msktc.org/sci/factsheets/skincare>