

## Pressure Ulcer Prevention in Children

### What is a Pressure Ulcer?

Pressure ulcer (also known as a pressure sore, bed sore or pressure injury) is an area of damaged skin caused by pressure, sliding and / or rubbing on the skin. The pressure stops blood getting to the skin and muscles to keep them healthy or damages the skin by rubbing it away. An injury is most likely to occur where bones are closest to the skin. Injuries to the skin are mostly caused by resting in the same position for a long time, having splints or medical equipment pressing or rubbing on the skin for long periods of time, or slipping down the sheets on a bed regularly.



### What Parts of the Body are Pressure Ulcers Likely to Occur?

Pressure ulcers can appear anywhere on a child's body. Common areas are:

- ☐ Back of the head (especially in babies, infants, toddlers)
- ☐ Ears
- ☐ Tailbone (sacrum / coccyx, sit bones)
- ☐ Heels
- ☐ Elbows
- ☐ Spine and shoulder blades
- ☐ Under plasters, casts, splints or braces
- ☐ Around medical equipment such as tubes, masks, drains, etc



### Who is at Risk of Getting a Pressure Ulcer?

Most children move their bodies and change position without realising they are doing it, even when they are asleep. Health problems and medical treatments can stop children from changing their position. Children most at risk are those who:

- ☐ Cannot move much on their own
- ☐ Have limited or no feeling to parts of their body
- ☐ Are in contact with another surface for long periods of time, such as wheelchair, splints, etc...
- ☐ Are in bed for long periods of time
- ☐ Have pressure or rubbing to an area of the body over long periods of time
- ☐ Are very unwell (such as after surgery or as a result of a pre-existing medical condition)
- ☐ Have problems with immunity
- ☐ If they are in pain
- ☐ Have a poor diet or have not been receiving enough food and fluids
- ☐ If they are incontinent (as this can cause areas of the skin to become moist)
- ☐ Are below the healthy weight range
- ☐ If they are very overweight and find it difficult to move
- ☐ If they have poor circulation



### Finding the Cause of a Pressure Ulcer



Most pressure ulcers will heal if the reason for the injury can be found and corrected. It is important to find the source of pressure and remove it.

### **How to We Spot a Pressure Ulcer?**

Common signs of pressure ulcers are:

- ☐ Red, purple/blue patches on the skin over a bony area or where the skin has been in contact with tubing or a type of splint. In children with dark tone skin this may look like a darker area compared to their normal skin tone.
- ☐ Broken or grazed areas on the skin over a bony area or where the skin has been in contact with tubing or a type of splint
- ☐ Blistering of the skin over a bony area or where the skin has been in contact with tubing or a type of splint
- ☐ Dry, hard or shiny patches of skin over a bony area. Sometimes it can feel swollen or very soft.
- ☐ An area of skin over a bony area that is warm or cooler to touch compared to the surrounding skin
- ☐ Pain (unless your child has reduced or impaired sensation) over a bony area or where the skin has been in contact with tubing or a type of splint

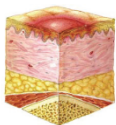
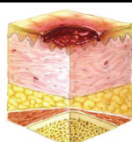
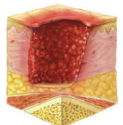
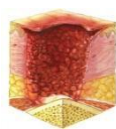
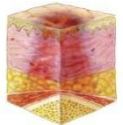
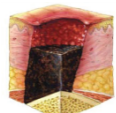
Ask your child to tell you if there are any sore areas on their body, or look for the following signs:

- ☐ Unsettled behaviours, distress, your child is grizzling or will not stop crying
- ☐ Unexplained fever
- ☐ Sweating
- ☐ Not hungry and / or not eating
- ☐ An area of skin that your child will not allow you to touch
- ☐ An area under a plaster, splint or brace that smells or is leaking fluid



**If your child has any of these symptoms please tell their nurse as soon as possible**

When a pressure ulcer is found, nurses & other healthcare staff will look at the injury carefully and give it a score (1, 2, 3, 4, deep tissue injury or unstageable). 1 is the least injury to the skin and 4 is the most serious injury to the skin and body.

| Category                 | Depth of sore compared to parts of an apple                                 |                                                                                     | Actual description                                                                                 | Appearance                                                                            |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Category 1               | Red apple doesn't change colour or a darker colour/purple-blue in dark skin |    | Non blanching redness of intact skin. Alteration of texture / temperature of the skin in dark skin |    |
| Category 2               | The peel                                                                    |    | Superficial broken area of skin or clear blister                                                   |    |
| Category 3               | The fleshy bit                                                              |    | Extends to the fat layer of the skin                                                               |    |
| Category 4               | The core                                                                    |    | Extends to the muscle & may involve ligaments, tendons & bone                                      |    |
| Deep Tissue Injury (DTI) | Bruised spot                                                                |  | Purple/maroon discoloured intact skin                                                              |  |
| Unstageable              | Toffee apple                                                                |  | The depth is masked by a scab-like covering over the wound                                         |  |

### Are Pressure Ulcers Serious?

The skin helps to stop germs from entering the body. Pressure ulcers can create breaks in the skin that could allow germs to enter your child's body and cause an infection. This can lead to serious illness for children who have problems with immunity or are already unwell. A deep or serious wound can lead to permanent scarring.



### How do We Prevent Pressure Ulcers?

If you think your child could develop a pressure ulcer or may already have one, please talk to your child's: General Practitioner, Nurse, Occupational Therapist, Community Nurse or other health care worker. You can discuss options that are suitable for your child. Actions you can take may include:

- ☐ Checking your child's skin regularly including under medical devices - morning and night

- ☐ Changing your child's position regularly. We recommend every two hours through the day and every four hours overnight
- ☐ Changing your child's nappy regularly. We recommend as soon as the nappy becomes wet or dirty. Every two to four hours is usual
- ☐ Using slide sheets to help move your child in bed (slide sheets are slippery synthetic fabric)
- ☐ Using equipment to help relieve pressure. This can include air mattresses and gel pads (you may wish to speak with an occupational therapist)
- ☐ Using soaps or creams that are pH neutral
- ☐ Making sure your child's skin is not too moist or too dry
- ☐ Encouraging your child to move (if suitable to their situation)
- ☐ Making sure your child is getting food and fluids that are right for them



### **Things to Avoid:**

- ☐ Stretching or pulling on the skin e.g. do not drag your child up the bed over the sheet
- ☐ Massaging or rubbing red areas. This can cause more damage to the skin.
- ☐ Using foam/ air/ donut/ ring cushions. These items have been shown to cause or make pressure injuries worse.



**If you notice any skin changes, tell your community children's nurse or GP straight away or as soon as possible**

Based on The Children's Hospital at Westmead, Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick and Kaleidoscope Children, Young People and Families.