

Preventing a pressure ulcer during your admission to gynaecology ward

Pressure ulcers, also known as bedsores, are injuries to the skin and underlying tissue caused by prolonged pressure. They can develop when pressure is applied to the skin by surfaces such as mattresses or medical devices like urinary catheters.

Who Is at Risk?

Anyone can develop a pressure ulcer, but patients in hospital—especially those recovering from surgery or experiencing reduced mobility—are at increased risk.

Common Areas Affected

Pressure ulcers most often occur on bony areas of the body, including:

- Coccyx (base of the spine)
- Hips
- Heels
- Elbows

They can develop in just a few hours.

Recognising the Signs

Early signs:

- Discoloured skin that doesn't change colour when pressed (may appear red, purple, or blue depending on skin tone)
- Skin that feels warm, spongy, hard, or painful

Advanced signs:

- Open wounds or blisters (Category 2)
- Deep wounds reaching the lower layers of skin (Category 3)
- Severe wounds that may extend to muscle or bone (Category 4)

Why Pressure Ulcers Can Occur During Your Admission

Pressure ulcers are not limited to older adults. They can affect anyone who:

- Has limited mobility due to surgery, pain, or fatigue
- Uses medical devices such as catheters or oxygen tubing
- Experiences reduced sensation due to medications or anaesthesia

Skin damage may result from:

- Pressure: Staying in one position too long or pressure from devices
- Friction/Shearing: Movement against bed sheets, similar to a carpet burn
- Moisture: Exposure to fluids like urine, sweat, or wound drainage can cause skin damage

How to Prevent Pressure Ulcers

Change Position Regularly

- *If you are unable to move easily, your nurse will assist or remind you to change position at least every hour*
- *A small tilt (around 30 degrees) or rolling to one side helps relieve pressure*
- Avoid sitting on hard surfaces, folded sheets, or medical tubing

Catheter Care

- Ensure catheter tubing is positioned correctly, resting on your thigh, not underneath your body

Mattresses and Cushions

- If you're at higher risk, your nurse or tissue viability nurse may recommend a special foam or dynamic mattress
- Advanced mattress systems may be used if needed during your recovery

Support from Your Nursing Team

Your nurses will help prevent pressure ulcers by:

- Assisting with regular position changes if you are unable to move independently
- Helping you mobilise as soon as it is safe after surgery or procedures
- Removing your catheter as soon as clinically appropriate
- Ensuring medical devices are positioned safely and comfortably
- Assessing your risk throughout your hospital stay

Nutrition and Hydration

- A balanced diet rich in protein, vitamins, and minerals supports healing
- Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated
- If needed, a dietitian can help create a tailored nutrition plan

Managing Diabetes

If you have diabetes, keeping your blood sugar well-controlled is essential. High blood sugar can slow healing and increase the risk of pressure ulcers and infections.

Summary

Not every patient will develop a pressure ulcer, but certain procedures and medical devices can increase the risk. Our nursing team is here to support you and help prevent pressure ulcers during your stay on the gynaecology ward.

This leaflet can be made available in different formats on request. If you would like to make any suggestions or comments about the content of this leaflet, then please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0151 702 4353 or by email at pals@lwh.nhs.uk

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