

Caring for Someone Confined to Bed

Preventing bedsores and complications

A BEDSORE CAN START IN TWO HOURS AND TAKE MONTHS TO HEAL

Pressure on the skin over a bony point cuts off its blood supply. **The single most effective prevention is changing position.** No mattress, cream or powder replaces this.

Position change — the core of everything

- **Change position every 2 hours, day and night.** Keep a written turning chart on the wall so everyone knows.
- Rotate through: on the back, tilted to the left, tilted to the right. Aim for a **30-degree tilt with pillows behind the back** rather than rolling fully onto the hip bone.
- **Place pillows between the knees and ankles**, and under the calves so that the **heels float clear of the bed** — heels are the second commonest site after the sacrum.
- **Do not raise the head of the bed more than 30 degrees** for long — the body slides down and shears the skin over the tailbone.
- **Lift, do not drag**, when moving the person. Use a draw sheet with two people.

AIR BEDS AND WATER BEDS

An **alternating-pressure air mattress** is the most useful device — it inflates and deflates cells in turn so the pressure point keeps shifting. Worth arranging for anyone likely to be in bed more than a few weeks.

A **water bed** spreads pressure more evenly than a plain mattress and is a cheaper option.

But neither replaces turning. Check the pump is working daily, keep bedding smooth with no wrinkles or crumbs, and **do not pile several sheets or a plastic cover on top** — that cancels the mattress's effect.

Do not use rubber rings or donut cushions — they cut off circulation in a ring around the area.

Daily care

- **Inspect the skin at every turn** — tailbone, hips, heels, elbows, shoulder blades, back of head, ears. **Redness that does not fade within 20 minutes of relieving pressure is the first sign of a sore.** Report it.
- Keep skin **clean and dry**. Change wet or soiled bedding immediately. Use a barrier cream if incontinent. **Do not massage over a bony prominence.**
- **Good food and fluids** — protein especially. Malnourished skin breaks down and will not heal.
- **Move every joint through its range twice daily**, and encourage deep breathing and coughing to protect the chest.
- Watch for constipation and for urinary infection.

Search: bedridden patient care, bedsores prevention, air bed, water bed, pressure ulcer, position change

