Preventing Pressure Ulcers While You are in the Hospital

When you are in the hospital, you can develop a sore on your skin called a pressure ulcer. Since pressure ulcers can slow your recovery, preventing pressure ulcers is very important to the staff of Massachusetts General Hospital. This flyer tells you what you and your caregivers can do to protect your skin and prevent pressure ulcers.

What is a pressure ulcer?

A pressure ulcer is a sore caused by lying or sitting in one place for a long time. Your skin and muscles are pressed between your tailbone, hipbone, heels or other bones and the bed or chair. This pressure slows the blood flow. Your skin and muscles do not get the oxygen and nutrients that you need to stay healthy and this can cause a pressure ulcer.

There are many things that can increase your chance of having a pressure ulcer including:

- Infections
- Poor blood flow
- Trouble moving or changing position
- Sliding down in the bed or chair
- Rubbing your skin often
- Loss of bowel or bladder control (incontinence)
- Problems feeling pressure or pain

What can we do to stop pressure ulcers?

There are many things we can do together to decrease the chance that you will have a pressure ulcer while you are in the hospital.

Look at your skin.

- We will look at your skin every day. This lets us see any early signs of a pressure ulcer.
- Tell your nurse if you see any redness on your skin, have pain, or decreased feeling in an area of your body.
Keep moving!
- Change your position about every 2 hours when in bed.
- Change your position about every 15 minutes when in a chair.
- Do not sit up in a chair for more than 2 hours at a time.
- We will remind you to change your position when you are in the bed or a in a chair.
- We will help you to move and change your position as needed.

Decrease the pressure.
- All standard mattresses at MGH help relieve pressure.
- We will get you a special chair pad if you need it.
- If you have an injury to your skin, your nurse will consult with the clinical nurse specialist or physical therapist to see if a different mattress or chair pad is needed.

Keep your skin clean and dry.
- It is important to wash and dry yourself well.
- We will help you bathe if needed.
- Some patients can’t control their bowel or bladder. This is called incontinence.
- When we visit you every 1-2 hours, we will help you use the bathroom and take care of your skin.

Eat a healthy diet.
- Eat the food served at mealtimes.
- Drink liquids and nutritional supplements if they are ordered.
- We will help you to eat and drink as needed.

Ask questions!
- Ask your nurse, clinical nurse specialist or doctor questions about your skin and your care.

Write questions for your caregivers here:
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Taking care of your skin is very important to us. By working together, we can help to prevent pressure ulcers when you are in the hospital.