Abertawe Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust is committed to preventing patients developing pressure ulcers. This information sheet contains the best advice currently available to help patients avoid developing a pressure ulcer.
Definition
A pressure ulcer is a localised area of damage to the skin and underlying tissue.

Tissue damage can range from a superficial red patch of skin through to a large open wound. Occasionally pressure ulcers can be serious. They can cause pain and infection and in severe cases the underlying muscle or bone can be destroyed.

Causes of Pressure Ulcers
A combination of:
• Pressure – normal body weight can squash the skin and injure the blood supply to the skin & tissues, which can lead to damage in susceptible people
• Shearing – strain forces apart the layers of tissue. This can happen when you slide down, or are dragged up, a bed or chair
• Friction – poor lifting and moving techniques can remove the top layers of the skin

Usually people can avoid the causes of pressure ulcers by moving around. If you are unable to do this you may be at risk of developing a pressure ulcer.

Factors which increase your risk of developing a Pressure Ulcer
• Problems with movement – your ability to move may be limited or you may be unable to move.
• Problems with sensitivity to pain or discomfort – some conditions (e.g. diabetes, stroke, spinal cord injury) and some treatments may reduce your sensitivity to pain or discomfort so that you are unaware of the need to move
• Poor circulation – may increase your risk of pressure ulcers due to reduced blood supply to the skin
• **Moist skin** – you may be at increased risk if your skin is not kept clean and dry
• **Pressure ulcers in the past** – scar tissue from a previous pressure ulcer is weaker and more prone to damage.
• **Inadequate diet and fluids** – poor diet can lead to weight loss and a lack of protein and vitamins. Lack of fluid may lead to dehydration. Both these factors increase the risk of developing a pressure ulcer

**Assessing your Risk**
A qualified nurse who is looking after you will examine you and ask you questions, this is called a “risk assessment”. If the assessment indicates that you are at risk the nurse will develop a plan of care to help prevent the development of a pressure ulcer. The prevention plan will be discussed and agreed with you and written into the nursing records. This plan will be reassessed if there is a change in your condition or circumstances.

**Healthcare staff will provide you with care and advice on:**
• Regular skin inspection
• Changing your position at frequent intervals and correct seating posture. If you are uncomfortable at any time, tell the staff who are looking after you.
• Special equipment (i.e. mattress, bed, cushion) to suit your specific needs. You should not use the following for pressure ulcer prevention: water-filled gloves, synthetic sheepskins, or “doughnut” type devices such as ring cushions or rubber rings.
If you or your carer notice possible or actual signs of skin damage, you should inform your healthcare staff immediately.

The most common sites for pressure damage are the **hips, base of the spine, buttocks and heels**, although, damage can occur almost anywhere on the skin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signs to look for on the skin:</th>
<th>The skin may feel unusually:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Purple/blue patches on dark skin</td>
<td>• Hard</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Red patches on light skin</td>
<td>• Warm or hot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Swelling over a bony area</td>
<td>• Swollen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Blisters or broken skin</td>
<td>• Dry</td>
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If you need further advice about any aspect of prevention, remember your nurse and doctor are there to help you.

Additional information can be obtained from:

- National Institute for Health & Clinical Excellence **0870 155 5455** request booklet **N0913**
- Visit [www.nice.org.uk/CG029](http://www.nice.org.uk/CG029)
- Visit [www.yourturn.co.uk](http://www.yourturn.co.uk)
- PUPIS (Pressure Ulcer Prevention Intervention Service)  
  ABM University NHS Trust **01792 703609**