

Your opinion matters

Have an open conversation with your care team about any skin changes you notice and how well your loved one's discomfort is managed. Use skincare products and treatments only as advised. Keeping a record of skin conditions and any care provided will be helpful.

For more resources on palliative care, visit singaporehospice.org.sg

About Singapore Hospice Council

Established in 1995, Singapore Hospice Council is a registered charity and an Institution of a Public Character (IPC). We are an umbrella body representing organisations that actively provide hospice and palliative care in Singapore. For more information, visit singaporehospice.org.sg.

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Understanding Skin & Wound Care

A gentle guide for preventing and managing skin and wound changes in your loved one





Introduction

Patients receiving palliative care often encounter skin problems due to their advanced disease and declining physical health. The risk of developing wounds also increases as the body deteriorates due to a severe illness.

The key areas to ensuring good skin care is to manage skin breakdown, preventing further skin breakdown with the understanding of the causes and addressing its associated symptoms.

Prevention tips will also be shared in this leaflet so as to empower caregivers to take the first step in preventing skin injuries and promoting good skin care routine while caring for your loved ones.



Common Skin & Wound Conditions

1. Moisture Associated Skin Damage (MASD)

MASD occurs when the skin comes into contact with constant moisture including urine, stool, perspiration, and discharges from wound, mucus or even saliva.

The alteration of the skin's environment might increase bacterial growth and infection to the skin. This can cause pain and the prolonged erosion to the skin can increase chances for infection.

Incontinence Associated Dermatitis (IAD)

is one of the most common form of MASD.

Common body areas at risk of developing MASD:

- Groin Region
- Armpits
- Skin folds like under the breast or abdominal folds, scrotum, neck region
- Buttocks
- Perianal region (skin surrounding the anus)



IAD over the buttocks



MASD over the skin folds

Ways to Manage MASD

STEP 1 SKIN CLEANSING

1

To change diapers regularly whenever it is soaked or wet with urine or stool.

Avoid using force when wiping the skin as it might result in abrasion and in doing so the skin becomes more sensitive to further damage.

Instead allow the skin to be gently pat dry or air dry after cleaning. PH-balanced skin cleanser designed for incontinence care can also be used for cleaning away urine, stools or even body fluids from the skin.

STEP 2 SKIN BARRIER PROTECTION

2

Apply skin barrier products to prevent further breakdown of the skin.

Skin barrier products include barrier creams, barrier sprays and ointments containing zinc oxide, petroleum or dimethicone.

To remove barrier cream, gently wash the area with warm water using fragrance free wipes or clean washcloth. Avoid scrubbing or rubbing the skin. Gently pat the area dry before applying a new layer of barrier cream. This should be done after each diaper change or whenever the skin is soiled with urine, stool, or body fluids.

2. Pressure Injuries

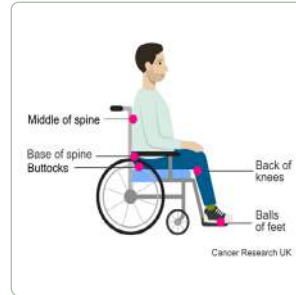
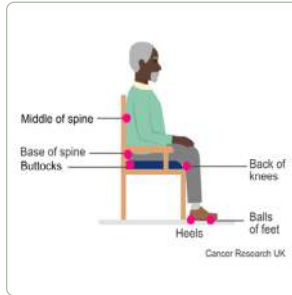
How and why does pressure injuries occur?

As the person becomes weaker, mobility becomes challenging. They spend most of their time lying in bed or sitting in the chair for prolonged periods.

At times, movement and changing positions could also be limited by pain.

Pressure injuries begin to develop when circulation to the skin becomes compromised due to continuous pressure. They can also occur when the skin experiences friction or when deeper tissues are damaged by pulling forces on the body. This may happen while sliding in bed or as a result of improper moving or transferring techniques.

Common Areas at Risk for Pressure Injuries



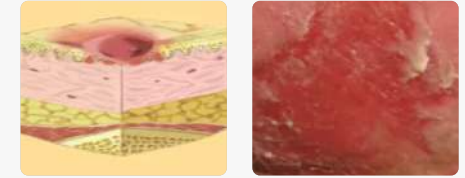
Pressure points (●) areas at risk of developing pressure injuries on the body

Recognising Signs of Pressure Injury

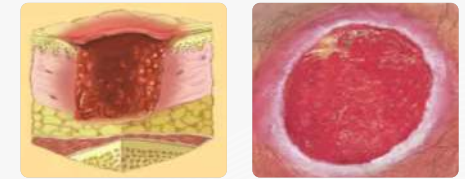
Redness on the skin that does not go away when pressed gently (non-blanchable) are at higher risk of developing pressure injury. For persons with darker skin tone, the skin injury may appear purplish/bluish discoloration or the person may experience pain, changes in skin temperature, or altered sensation.

Once the skin is damaged, blisters or open wounds may develop. As the wound worsens, it can affect the deeper skin tissues beneath the surface, including the underlying muscles or bones.

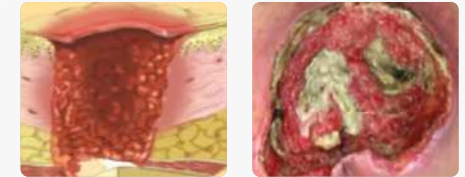
STAGE 2 The skin area becomes an open wound. It can appear red, blistered, or a shallow ulcer.



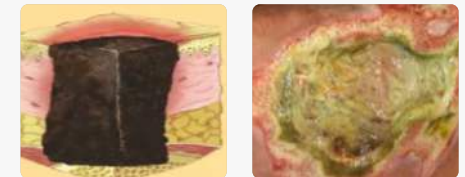
STAGE 3 The skin is broken, forming an open wound with a crater-like appearance. Fluid may leak from the wound.



STAGE 4 Severe skin damage with a deep wound that extends through the fat layer into deeper tissues. The underlying muscle, tendon, or bone are visible. This type of injury carries a high risk of infection. Pain and discomfort can be felt.

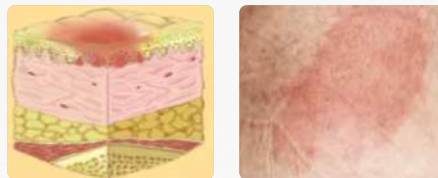


Unstageable Pressure Injury Presents as a wound with an unknown depth. The wound is covered by dead tissue, making it challenging to determine how deep the injury extends.



Stages of Pressure Injuries

STAGE 1 The earliest sign of skin damage caused by prolonged pressure. Likely from sitting or lying in one position for too long.



3. Kennedy Ulcers: Skin changes at the end of life

Terminally ill patients are at greater risk of developing pressure injuries and skin breakdown. This is due to impaired blood circulation, immobility and poorer appetite. Incontinence can also contribute to further skin damage.

At end of life, wounds may not heal despite best care efforts. The goal during this time is to prevent the wound or skin condition from getting worse. Some skin injuries occur as part of the natural dying process and may be unavoidable.

Kennedy ulcers are skin ulcers that may develop as a person approaches the end of life.

Kennedy ulcers present as irregularly shaped lesions that are maroon, blackish, or purplish in color, resembling bruises or open sores. They can appear as butterfly-shaped, pear-shaped or irregularly shaped. It is most commonly found on the buttocks or other bony areas such as the elbows, heels, or shoulders.

Development of Kennedy ulcer is not related to poor care or neglect but a natural part of the dying process. Caregivers can help by providing pain relief, keeping the skin clean and dry, applying gentle dressings, and repositioning the patient to reduce discomfort.

Please approach your hospice care team for further advice should you start noticing any skin changes on your loved ones.



Taking the First Step: Prevention Tips

Inspect skin daily especially on areas at risk for pressure injuries. (refer to image under section common areas at risk of pressure injuries)

Change the diaper and bedsheet whenever it is soiled. Apply barrier cream after each diaper change to protect the skin.

Once a person becomes bed-bound or chair-bound and finds it difficult to reposition themselves, turning and pressure relief should be done every 2 to 3 hours. This helps reduce the risk of pressure injuries., especially on the bony areas of the body. (refer to image under section common areas at risk of pressure injuries).

Use appropriate pressure relieving devices such as pressure relieving mattress, heel protectors. Avoid direct pressure on bony areas. Use pillows or foam wedges to reduce pressure on areas such lower back, spine, tailbone, heels and elbows. Your healthcare professional or hospice care team will be able to provide further advice on what will be suitable for your loved one.

Ensure medical devices (e.g. oxygen mask or tubing, feeding tube, orthopedic cast) are not pressing onto the skin creating pressure.

Ensure adequate pain relief. It can be challenging to perform proper and regular repositioning if pain is not well controlled.



Conclusion

Taking care of your loved one's skin means understanding what causes skin damage and how to manage them.

Terminally ill patients are especially vulnerable to skin injuries due to factors like impaired blood circulation, immobility, poor appetite, and incontinence.

With your care and attention, you can help protect their skin, maintain skin health and improve quality of life during this challenging time.

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