

## Pressure Care Advice C14

Alzheimer National Helpline  
1800 341 341

### Other Useful Publications

- Moving and Handling
- Communication
- Practical steps to support your independence
- Engaging activities at home
- Practical tips for living well with dementia
- Understanding change
- Information for Families - Life story book at home
- Assisting with Personal Care
- Understanding Late Stage Dementia

### Useful Contacts

#### The Alzheimer Society of Ireland

Contact the Alzheimer National Helpline Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm Saturday, 10am to 4pm Freephone 1800 341 341.

Email: [helpline@alzheimer.ie](mailto:helpline@alzheimer.ie)

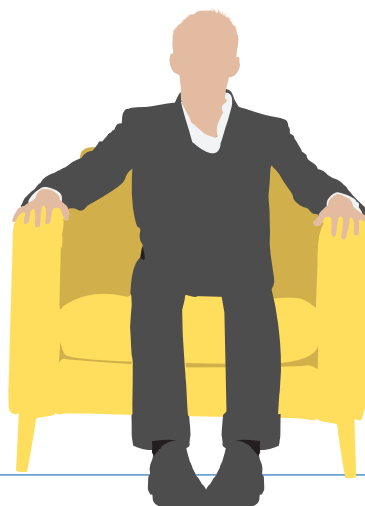
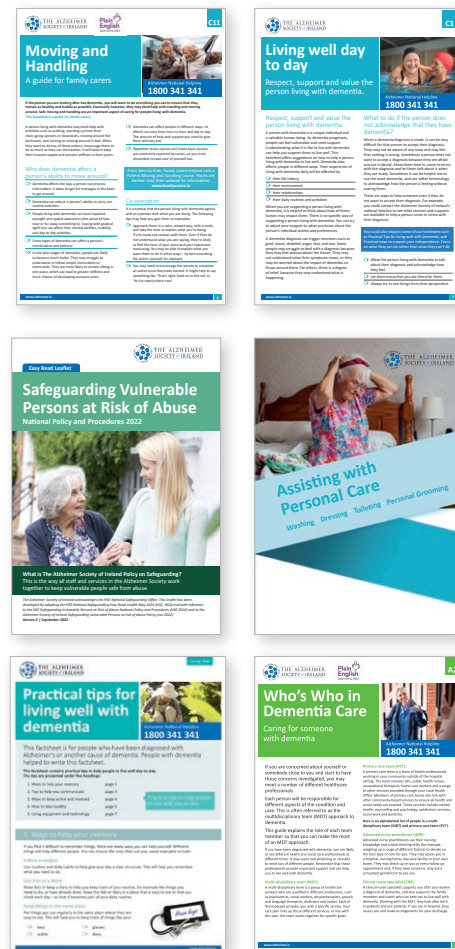
Visit / Live Chat [www.alzheimer.ie](http://www.alzheimer.ie)

#### HSE

The Health Service Executive (HSE) To find out where your local HSE Health Centre is or to ask about services that may be available in your area including occupational therapy and physiotherapy;

Call: 1800 700 700

Visit: [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)



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# Pressure Care Advice C14



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If you are looking after someone living with dementia, it is important to be aware of the risk of pressure ulcers and the steps you can take to prevent them; especially if they have become less mobile.

The information is presented under the following headings:

1. What is a pressure ulcer?
2. Why may a person living with dementia be at risk?
3. What can I do to help prevent pressure ulcers
4. Other helpful tips

## 1. What is a pressure ulcer?

Pressure ulcers are commonly referred to as pressure sores or bed sores.

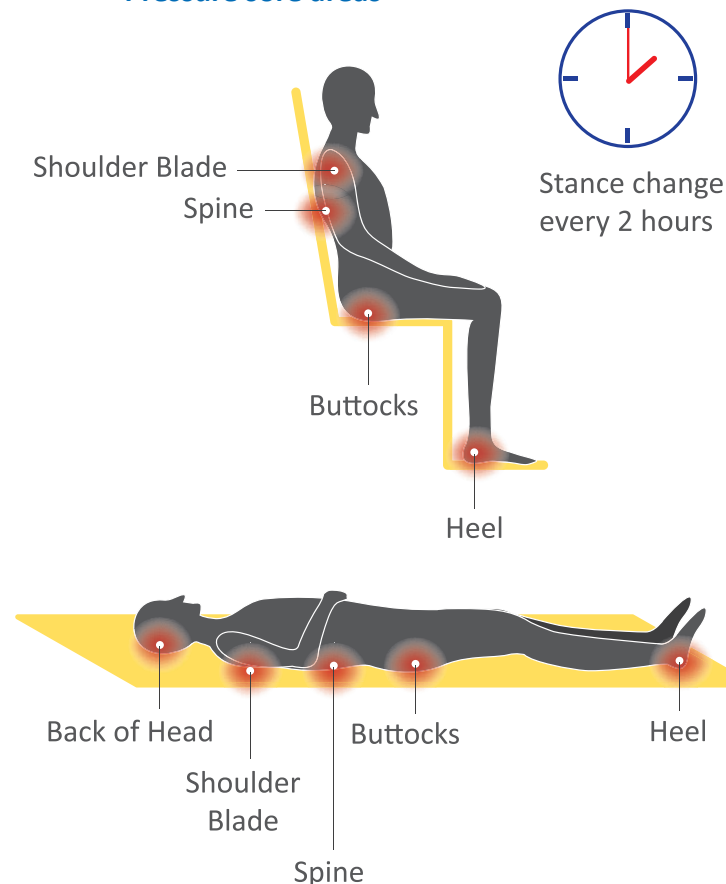
A pressure ulcer can be caused when someone sits or lies in the same position for too long. This can result in the blood supply being cut off and damaging the skin.

If you notice any change of colour (often redness), a blister, a break in the skin, swelling or patches of hot or cold skin which do not disappear after a few hours, it may indicate that a pressure ulcer is developing, and this requires immediate attention. These areas may be painful, hard or hot to touch. Other indicators which require urgent medical review include any area of skin which is very dark (blue/purple) or black in colour especially if this area is hard to the touch or any area that appears to be hollow or soft underneath the skin.

Areas which are most at risk are heels, toes, spine, elbows, bottom, shoulders and hips.

A pressure ulcer can develop in only a few hours however they can be avoided and prevented.

### Pressure sore areas



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### 2. Why may a person living with dementia be at risk?

Older people in general are at higher risk of pressure ulcers, particularly if they have difficulty moving. Dementia makes this risk even higher, especially as it progresses. Some of the factors that may increase the risk are listed below:

- Sensation - The person may have reduced sensation of pain.
- Poor diet and dehydration - The person may not be eating and drinking well which will increase the risk of skin breakdown and interfere with the skin's ability to heal.
- Incontinence - The person may be incontinent. Excessive moisture on the skin due to urinary and/or faecal incontinence increases the risk of pressure ulcers.
- Reduced mobility - The person may have difficulty turning in bed or changing position in their chair.
- Communication - The person may be less able to tell someone that they are in pain or want to move.
- Lack of Insight - The person may have decreased insight into or not remember the need to move regularly.

### 3. What can I do to help prevent pressure ulcers?

#### Skin

Inspect skin regularly - whenever you help the person to wash or dress or if they seem to be in discomfort. If you notice any of the above mentioned changes, any breaks or unusual spots of skin, seek advice from your GP or public health nurse urgently.

#### Surfaces

The two most common surfaces that people have prolonged contact with are a chair and a bed. If the person is sitting or lying for long periods of time, a pressure relieving cushion and mattress may be required. Please link with your public health nurse to arrange an assessment for this.

#### Lying in the bed

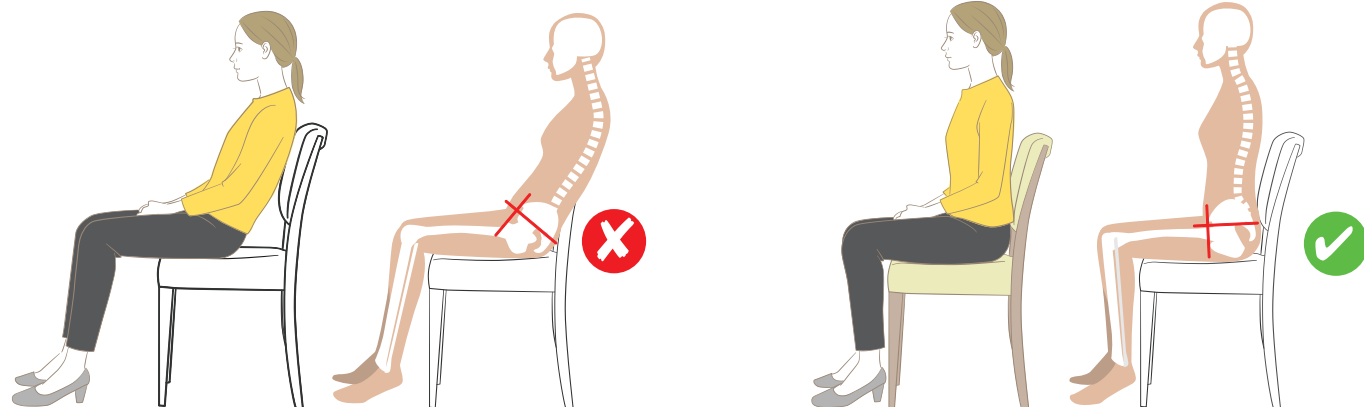
When people are in bed, they normally move around - even when they are sleeping. In the later stages of dementia, people may move a lot less which can lead to physical decline and can subsequently lead to pressure ulcers developing.

If the person living with dementia is spending long periods in the bed and has difficulty changing position or turning, please contact the public health nurse/occupational therapist regarding optimal positioning and pressure care.

#### Sitting on the chair

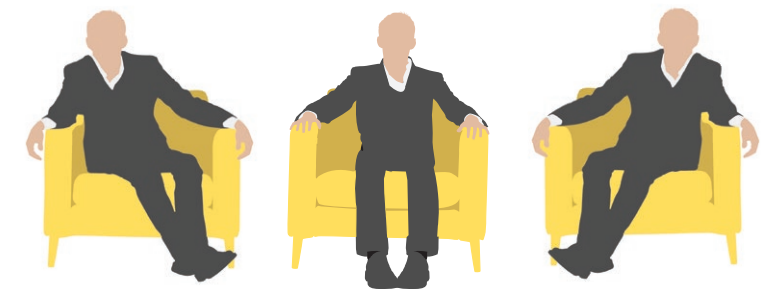
Most people shift around naturally when they are sitting down. However, in the later stages of dementia, people may be more likely to stay in one position for a long time. This can increase the risk of pressure ulcers developing.

Encourage the person to change their position in the chair every 15-30 minutes while they're sitting. This can be done by shifting weight from side to side.



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- Shifting weight from side to side, lifting bottom up from the chair.
- Assist them to stand up and walk around at least every couple of hours if they are able. Contact the public health nurse regarding pressure-relieving seat cushions if the person is sitting for long periods.
- Ask about being referred to an occupational therapist, especially if the person needs a wheelchair or specialist seating.
- Consider using a memory aid - e.g., a timer alarm - to encourage the person to change position independently.



#### Keep Moving

Encourage the person to change position at least every 1 to 2 hours and to keep as active as possible. Consider the use of a memory aid/ device to prompt the person to move.

#### Incontinence

Damp skin can be more damaged by pressure. Use absorbent pads or incontinence products to manage incontinence - please link with public health nurse for further information.

#### Nutrition

Try to make sure the person has a good, balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids. Good nutrition means the skin will be healthier and more resistant to pressure ulcers developing - if there are any concerns about a person's nutritional or fluid intake, please ask the public health nurse or GP for a referral to the community dietician for advice.

#### Avoiding friction

As people age, their skin becomes more delicate. Even gentle friction on the skin can, over time, increase the risk of pressure ulcers.

- Keep bed linen clean, dry and free of wrinkles.
- Avoid sitting or lying on seams, zips, buttons and back pockets.
- Avoid repeated friction and shearing which can happen by sliding down or moving up in bed or chair.
- If there are concerns about the person sliding in the bed or chair please contact the public health nurse and occupational therapist.

### 4. Other helpful tips

- Try and encourage the person to avoid or reduce smoking.
- Keep skin clean and dry and avoid heavily perfumed products and talcum powder that may soak up the skin's natural oils and dry it out.
- Make sure the person is thoroughly dry after a bath or wash, particularly in the skin folds. Pat rather than rub dry.

You should contact the public health nurse and GP straight away if you are concerned about a pressure ulcer.

**Contact the Alzheimer National Helpline for free confidential help and support.**

The Helpline is open Monday to Friday 10am to 5pm and Saturday 10am to 4pm.  
 Freephone **1800 341 341**.  
 Email: [helpline@alzheimer.ie](mailto:helpline@alzheimer.ie) or visit live chat via [www.alzheimer.ie](http://www.alzheimer.ie)