

When our skin is healthy it is a remarkable and vital part of our body. Our skin protects us, stretches over our joints, and can heal itself when it is cut or injured. Unfortunately, many residents in long term care have skin that is always at risk of injury, and is slow to heal when it is injured. This may lead to a **pressure ulcer**.



Healthy Skin in Continuing Care

An ulcer is any hole in something that should not have a hole in it. In this case, it is the skin. You may also hear it referred to as a **wound**, which means an injury to the skin.

Pressure ulcers may develop on anybody, when the pressure on an area of skin is more than the skin can endure. In many of our residents the skin can not endure much pressure at all due to problems such as poor circulation caused by diabetes, smoking, or hardened arteries. Excessive pressure on one small area of skin occurs when a patient is immobilized due to paralysis or a serious medical condition.

Once a pressure ulcer, or any wound, has occurred it may be difficult for the body to heal the wound when the skin has poor healing abilities, as in an elderly person, or someone with poor nutrition, or when there is difficulty in getting pressure off of the affected area. A lack of normal bowel or bladder function will of course affect wound healing as well.

Our staff at CapitalCare assess all residents for their risk of developing skin problems, especially pressure ulcers. Special precautions and pressure relieving beds are used when a risk is found. Bedside staff watch for early signs of skin problems on all residents, so that steps can be taken before a serious problem develops.

Once a wound of any type is present a plan to promote skin healing is made, with advice from all members of the health care team working together as a **Wound Care Team**. The physician and pharmacist look at what medical or surgical treatments may help healing. Occupational and physical therapists assess mobility and pressure issues. The dietitian may suggest nutritional changes to promote healing. Of the many different types

of dressings available, the nursing staff will decide on the best type for each particular wound on each resident. The progress of the wound healing is monitored frequently and consistently.

The health professionals on the Wound Care Team would like to work with you to ensure you and your loved one understand the plan for healing, and to advise you on the prognosis. They can also answer any skin care questions that you may have.

On a final note, we know from experience that even with the best prevention and treatment, wounds may still occur and may not ever heal. On the bright side, there is a lot of research and education happening right now, to help us all solve this problem.

For more information, please contact your Care Manager.

How to maintain healthy skin

- Treat skin gently.
- Apply moisturizers to dry skin.
- Avoid using perfumed creams, rough washcloths, cream between toes, solutions with high alcohol content.
- Report appetite changes to Nurse or Registered Dietitian
- Ensure your room is clutter free to prevent falls.
- Wear long sleeved shirts and long pants to prevent tears.
- Avoid wearing jewelry if you provide care.
- Consider adaptive clothing options.
- Report any skin changes to nursing staff. For example, redness that does not go away after taking pressure off for 30 minutes, swelling and blisters.
- Ask staff about options for relieving pressure.
- Ensure that you understand how to use any equipment properly.
- Try to shift your weight and to change your position as often as possible