

Spinal Cord Injury Quick Guide



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

Preventing pressure sores

Take care of your skin:

- Use a moisture barrier on your skin, such as zinc oxide or silicone cream.
- Change sheets or wound dressings often when they are wet.
- Do not use harsh soaps and skin products that have alcohol in them.
- Use moisturizing lotion on your skin often.
- To dry your skin, gently pat dry with a towel. Do not rub your skin.
- If you are incontinent, gently clean the skin well after an accident.
- Do not use hot water or heating pads on your skin.
- Do not massage over bony parts, like your hips, tailbone or shoulders.
- Eat a well balanced diet and drink 8 (8-ounce) glasses of fluids each day.

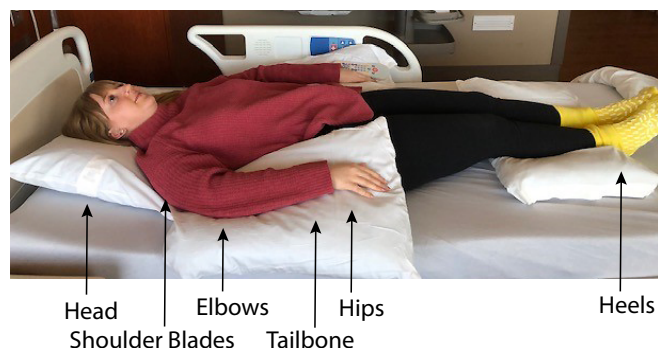
If you are in a wheelchair:

- Do pressure reliefs – lift yourself up to take the pressure off areas and to let the blood circulate for 30 to 90 seconds.
- Sit up straight in the chair and shift your weight from one side to the other every 15 minutes.
- Use a special seat cushion or pad made to reduce pressure.
- Use a foot rest or stool to support feet and take pressure off your knees.
- You may need help from someone else or a tilting power wheelchair.

If you are in a bed:

- Change your body position at least every 2 to 4 hours.
- Use pillows or a foam wedge to keep bony body parts from touching each other.
- No wrinkles on bottom sheet, no crumbs in bed and no items on the bed.

Place Pillows to Prevent Pressure Sores in Bed



Autonomic dysreflexia

Autonomic dysreflexia (AD) is an emergency. It is a sudden nervous system response to pain or other things that irritate the body. It can be fatal if you have spinal cord injury at or above the thoracic 6 level (T6).

Common causes:

- Full bladder
- Bladder infection
- Full bowel (constipation)
- Pressure sore
- Tight clothing or shoes
- Ingrown toenail
- Anything painful
- Genital stimulation

Watch for 1 or more of these signs:

- Pounding headache
- Flushing
- Sweating
- Sudden sharp rise in blood pressure
- Slow pulse rate
- Chills
- Goose bumps
- Stuffy nose
- Anxious feeling

What to do:

- Sit up. Lower your legs, if you are able.
- Find the source of irritation:
 - » Remove tight clothing.
 - » Check catheter for kinks or catheterize yourself.
 - » Check for impacted bowel and remove stool with lubricating jelly.
 - » Check for ingrown toenails, pressure sores and skin breaks.
- Take medicine as ordered by doctor.
- **Call your doctor, call 911 or go to the emergency department right away.**

Orthostatic blood pressure (BP)

This is taking your BP and pulse after you have been lying down. This is done because you may have a drop in BP when you go from lying down to a different position, such as sitting up or standing.

Take orthostatic BP and pulse _____ times each day.

- Check **before** taking your BP medicine.
- Check when lying, then sitting and 2 more times when you stand (if you are able).

Your goal BP is _____.

- Normal BP is 120/80 or less.
- Normal pulse is 60 to 100.

Follow these steps:

1. Do not eat or smoke for 30 minutes before you check your BP and pulse.
2. Lay down for 5 to 10 minutes.
3. Take your BP and pulse and record the numbers.
4. Sit for 2 to 3 minutes on the edge of the bed.
5. Take your BP and pulse and record the numbers.

If you are able to stand, do steps 6 to 8:

6. Stand and take your BP and pulse right away, and then record the numbers.
7. Wait 3 minutes.
8. Take your BP and pulse again, and record the numbers.

Call the doctor if:

- Your top number (systolic) is lower than your goal BP **and** you feel dizzy or light-headed when you stand or sit up.
- Your pulse is less than 60.

Skin checks

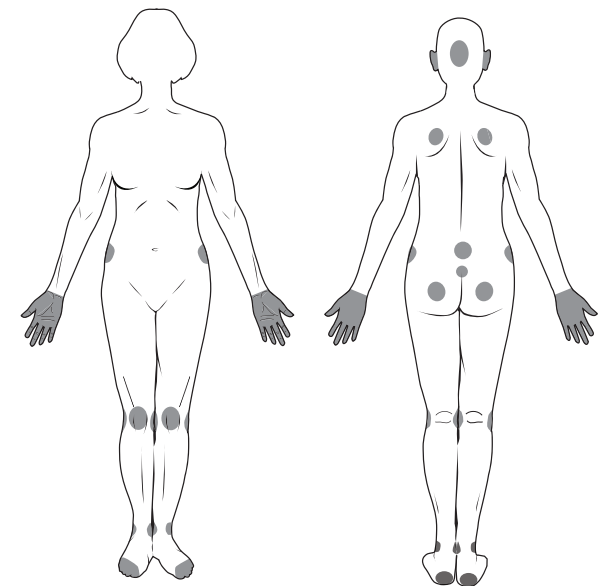
- Check your skin at least 2 times each day, such as in the morning and in the evening. Check more often if you are sitting or lying down a lot.
- Check under any splints, casts or braces at least 2 times each day.
- If you can't do the skin checks yourself, have someone help you.
- Look and touch the skin to be sure you are able to see all areas well. Using a mirror with a long handle may help.

Doing the check:

- Wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after doing skin checks.
- Start at your head and work down to your toes. Check the front, back and sides of your body, any newly healed skin, under skin folds and any bony areas.
- For men with catheters on outside, check penis for sores or rash.
- Check finger and toenails for any ingrown, rough or sharp nails.
- If you have any loss of feeling in your toes or feet, check your feet and between and under your toes at least 1 time each day.

What to look for:

- Areas that are more pink, red, bluish, pale or shiny than skin around it.
- Blisters, bruises, cracks or openings in the skin surface.
- Damp or moist skin, or dry or flaky areas.
- Feel for any areas that are:
 - » Firm or hard
 - » Swollen
 - » Warm or cool



Bony Areas Most at Risk for Pressure Sores

Call your doctor if you see any of these changes.