

Preventing and Managing Pressure Ulcers

Neonatal Unit

You have been given this information leaflet because your baby is at risk of developing a pressure ulcer. This leaflet will help you understand what a pressure ulcer is, what causes them and how they are treated.

Why is my baby at risk of developing a pressure ulcer?

Pressure ulcers are rare in neonates, although pre-term and seriously ill neonates do form a specific risk group. Neonatal skin, particularly pre-term skin, is very thin and has a very small amount of fatty tissue. Ventilated babies, a lack of movement and the presence of medical equipment, increase the risk for pressure ulcer development. Premature babies and sick term babies are at risk of developing pressure ulcers due to poor nutrition, anaemia, recurrent infection, poor circulation and dehydration.

What is a pressure ulcer?

Pressure ulcers are areas of damage to the skin and underlying tissues, developing quickly in babies. For babies with darker skin it is difficult to notice redness of the skin, it may look blue or purple in colour. It may also look tight and shiny.

Pressure ulcers can vary in the way they look from a red mark or a blister to a deep wound on your baby's skin. It may initially appear as a red area that does not disappear after a few hours. The area may become painful and tender, continued pressure and poor circulation can cause the skin and tissue to break down.

What causes a pressure ulcer?

Pressure

This is due to the weight of the body pressing on the skin. Lying in the same position for a long time can cause this. It is important that your baby's position is changed regularly to relieve the pressure on their skin. It is also important to give pressure relief from any medical devices making contact with the skin, such as CPAP prongs and masks.

Friction

This is when skin is repeatedly rubbed against a surface like a mattress, bedding or other equipment. This damages the top layer of skin (e.g., blister).

The prevention of infection is a major priority in all healthcare and everyone has a part to play.

- Please decontaminate your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water or alcohol gel if available
- If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, cough or other respiratory symptoms, a temperature or any loss of taste or smell please do not visit the hospital or any other care facility and seek advice from 111
- Keep the environment clean and tidy
- Let's work together to keep infections out of our hospitals and care homes.

Shear

This is when skin is pulled across a surface in opposite directions. Pulling your baby up the bed can cause this. Their skin may become sore and the skin may split and break.

Can pressure ulcers be prevented?

The most important factor in pressure ulcer prevention is avoiding prolonged pressure on the skin. This can be achieved by regular position changes, passive movements and giving pressure relief. Your baby will be continually assessed and monitored according to their individual care needs. Position changes and pressure relief will be given according to your baby's needs. It is important to monitor skin regularly for early warning signs such as redness or pain especially in areas where medical devices contact the skin. The most common areas for pressure ulcers in babies are ears, nose, buttocks, knees and head.

Gel mattresses and developmental aids are used to relieve pressure on your baby's skin and help with re-positioning. They are also used to support medical devices and equipment to reduce any pressure they may place on your baby. They also protect them from lines and tubing that may otherwise contact their skin.

Ensure your baby is not lying on any tubing, wires or other equipment and bedding and sheets are not creased.

It is important to keep skin clean and dry, especially in skin folds and behind ears. Some medical devices, such as CPAP and High Flow can cause excessive moisture around the nose and mouth, due to humidity. Your nurse will ensure this area is cleaned and dried regularly and protective dressings are changed when wet.

How will the pressure ulcer be treated?

The wound will be assessed, measured and documented. Photographs may also be taken to monitor the wound. Your baby may be referred to the Tissue Viability Team. The affected area will be cleaned and a dressing will be applied to the area. Regular assessment of the wound and dressing changes will be carried out to ensure the wound is healing appropriately.

For further information, please speak to the Nurse looking after your baby.

Contact Details

Unit Manager or your consultant
Neonatal Unit
Maternity Building
New Cross Hospital
WV10 0QP
Tel: 01902 694032

Reference

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (2014). The prevention and management of pressure ulcers. London, Royal College of Nursing.

Glossary

- **Ventilated** – Where a plastic tube is placed in the mouth to the lungs to enable a machine to breathe artificially for your baby
- **Nutrition** – The essential ingredients needed for the body to function normally
- **Anaemia** – low levels of red blood cells
- **Dehydration** – loss of fluid from the body
- **CPAP** – Continuous positive airway pressure, a device used to supporting breathing via nasal prongs or mask.

English

If you need information in another way like easy read or a different language please let us know.

If you need an interpreter or assistance please let us know.

Lithuanian

Jeigu norėtumėte, kad informacija jums būtų pateikta kitu būdu, pavyzdžiui, supaprastinta forma ar kita kalba, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Jeigu jums reikia vertėjo ar kitos pagalbos, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Polish

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać te informacje w innej postaci, na przykład w wersji łatwej do czytania lub w innym języku, prosimy powiedzieć nam o tym.

Prosimy poinformować nas również, jeżeli potrzebowaliby Państwo usługi tłumaczenia ustnego lub innej pomocy.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਪੜ੍ਹਨ ਵਿਚ ਆਸਾਨ ਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੂਜੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ, ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜਾਂ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

Romanian

Dacă aveți nevoie de informații în alt format, ca de exemplu caractere ușor de citit sau altă limbă, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Dacă aveți nevoie de un interpret sau de asistență, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Traditional Chinese

如果您需要以其他方式了解信息，如易读或其他语种，请告诉我们。

如果您需要口译人员或帮助，请告诉我们。