

Skin Care

What is happening

As illness progresses, patients often spend more time:

- In bed
- Sitting in one position
- Moving less frequently

This increases the risk of skin breakdown and pressure injuries (bedsores), which can cause:

- Pain
- Infection
- Discomfort

Preventing skin breakdown is an important part of comfort-focused care.

Areas at highest risk

Pay special attention to:

- Tailbone (sacrum)
- Hips
- Heels
- Elbows

These areas are more likely to develop pressure injuries.

Stages of skin breakdown

Stage 1

- Persistent redness or discoloration

Stage 2

- Loss of the outer layer of skin
- Red or open sore

Stage 3

- Deeper skin loss or ulcer formation

Stage 4

- Deep ulcer with visible muscle or bone

Special end-of-life skin changes

Some patients near the end of life may develop a:

- Kennedy ulcer (also called a terminal ulcer)

This often:

- Begins suddenly
- May look like a bruise near the tailbone
- Can progress rapidly over hours or days

These skin changes can occur despite good care and are sometimes part of the natural dying process.

What you can do

Repositioning

- If possible, help reposition at least every 2 hours
- Even small position changes may help reduce pressure

Do not avoid repositioning because movement causes discomfort:

- Use available pain medications if needed

Skin protection

- Keep skin clean and dry
- Change diapers or protective briefs promptly when soiled
- Use pillows or wedges to reduce pressure on sensitive areas

Skin checks

Try to inspect high-risk areas regularly for:

- Redness
- Open areas
- Painful spots
- New skin changes

Supplies and support

The hospice team can provide:

- Dressings
- Barrier creams

- Skin protection products
- Guidance on repositioning and wound care

Ask the hospice team to inspect the skin during visits.

When to call hospice

- New redness or open areas appear
- Skin breakdown is worsening
- Pain increases
- Drainage, odor, or signs of infection develop
- You are unsure how to reposition safely
- You need additional supplies or support