

Basic Care: Importance of Changing Position

What is happening

As illness progresses, patients often spend more time:

- In bed
- Sitting in a chair
- Moving less independently

Remaining in one position for too long can reduce blood flow to the skin and underlying tissue, leading to:

- Pressure sores
- Skin breakdown
- Pain and discomfort

Pressure sores are also called:

- Pressure ulcers
- Bed sores

Why pressure sores develop

Pressure sores most commonly occur over bony areas such as:

- Tailbone
- Hips
- Heels
- Elbows

Risk increases with:

- Limited movement
- Poor nutrition
- Weight loss
- Increased time in bed or a chair

Pressure injuries can develop surprisingly quickly—sometimes within only a few hours.

Why changing position matters

Regular repositioning helps:

- Reduce pressure on the skin
- Improve blood flow

- Prevent painful skin breakdown
- Improve overall comfort

Changing position is one of the most important things caregivers can do to help prevent pressure sores.

What you can do

Reposition regularly

If possible:

- Reposition about every 2 hours during the day

Alternate between:

- Back
- Right side
- Left side

Small position changes can still be very helpful.

You do not need to wake the patient repeatedly during the night solely to maintain a strict schedule.

However, if they are already awake, it is a good opportunity to reposition.

Use pillows for support

Pillows may help:

- Reduce pressure
- Improve comfort
- Maintain safe positioning

Examples:

- Behind the back for side positioning
- Under the legs to reduce heel pressure
- Between knees or ankles for comfort

Repositioning in chairs

Patients sitting in recliners or wheelchairs also need repositioning.

Even small shifts in position may help reduce pressure.

Equipment that may help

Hospice may provide special surfaces or equipment such as:

- Egg-crate mattress overlays
- Chair cushions or pads
- Alternating-pressure air mattresses
- Specialized mattresses for severe skin breakdown

These devices help distribute pressure more evenly and improve comfort.

Check the skin regularly

Watch for:

- Redness
- Warm or darkened areas
- Open skin
- Painful spots

Early treatment is important.

Important caregiver reminder

Preventing pressure sores is important, but caregivers should also protect their own safety.

Ask for help from the hospice team if:

- Repositioning becomes physically difficult
- The patient is very heavy or difficult to move safely
- Skin breakdown is worsening despite repositioning

When to call hospice

- New redness or open areas develop
- Skin breakdown worsens
- Pain increases during repositioning
- The patient becomes difficult to move safely
- You need additional equipment or support
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