

GREAT YARMOUTH AND WAVENEY WHEELCHAIR SERVICE

YOUR NEW CUSHION & AVOIDING PRESSURE ULCERS

Patient Information Document

January 2015

This guide has been written to provide you with information about your new cushion and advise you on avoiding pressure sores.

Please keep this document safe as it contains information you may need. You might like to show it to any other Health Service Staff or carers who visit you.

Your cushion has been supplied to you by:

Great Yarmouth and Waveney Wheelchair Service

Kirkley Mill Health Centre

Clifton Road

Lowestoft

Suffolk

NR33 0HF

Telephone Number: 01502 532182

The cushion is intended for use in your wheelchair only

YOUR NEW CUSHION

This information relates only to the cushion you have been issued with this time.

The cushion has been chosen to meet your particular needs from the information we were given about you. If you do not think it is suitable, your needs change, or you no longer need the cushion please contact the Wheelchair Service.

When you sit on the cushion you may feel it squashing down. This is normal and you will find it is contouring to the shape of your bottom. If you think it has squashed so much that there is no more cushion between you and the canvas (this is called 'bottoming out') you need to ask us to check it.

How long will the cushion last?

Your cushion should last for at least 2 years. If it is only being used for a few hours a day it may last much longer.

If you have had your cushion for a long time and think it needs replacing please contact the Wheelchair Service.

What are Pressure Ulcers?

Pressure ulcers/sores are injuries to the skin which are caused by unrelieved pressure. They can range from very mild (minor skin reddening) to severe (deep craters down to the muscle and bone). Skin reddening that disappears after the pressure is removed is common and does not mean there is a pressure ulcer. Unrelieved pressure on the skin squeezes the tiny blood vessels that supply the tissues with vital nutrients and oxygen. If starved of nutrients and oxygen for too long tissue dies and an ulcer forms.

Sliding down in a chair or bed can also cause pressure ulcers to form because tissues are stretched and blood vessels squeezed.

Fortunately most pressure ulcers can be prevented.

Where do pressure ulcers form?

The main places that pressure sores form are under bony prominences, where the tissues are squeezed against the bone. In bed the most common areas tend to be on the sacrum (the lower back, a few inches from below the waist) the hip bones and on the heels. In a chair or wheelchair it will depend on how you are sitting but common areas are the buttocks and sacrum.

Pressure ulcers can also develop on the back of knees, the spine, shoulder blades and the back of the head. These are uncommon but if you think you are at risk from these you should ask for someone to assess you.

Your risk factors

The following will give you some idea of the main risk factors for developing a pressure ulcer.

1. **Bed or Chair Confinement** – Generally people spend their days in a variety of positions, walking, lying and sitting. If illness or disability means that a person is forced to stay in one position for a long time your risk of developing a pressure ulcer is increased.
2. **Inability to Move** – Even though a person may be confined to bed or in a chair it is often still possible to alter position slightly to relieve the pressure on different parts of the body. If a person is unable to do this without help there is more risk of developing ulcer and therefore consideration needs to be taken regarding the level of care required. Later in this booklet there is some advice on simple ways to relieve the pressure while sitting in a wheelchair.
3. **Dehydration** – This will cause your skin to become dry and more vulnerable to injury.
4. **Poor Nutrition** – Pressure ulcers are less likely to develop in healthy well nourished skin. Therefore it is important to eat a balanced diet to make sure your skin gets enough nutrients to keep it healthy. It is also vital to drink plenty of fluids.

5. **Loss of Bladder or Bowel Control** – This will cause excess moisture that may irritate the skin and increase the risk of ulcers. Personal hygiene is very important in keeping skin healthy and preventing pressure ulcers.

What can you do?

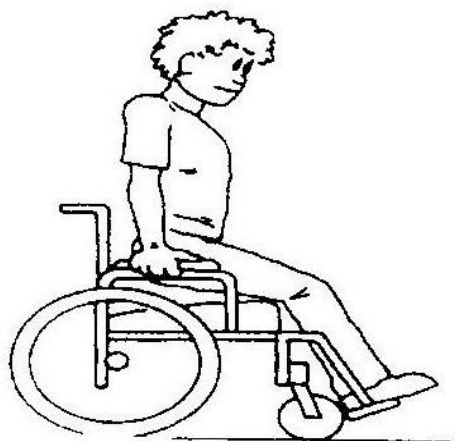
- Inspect your skin every day. Look out for redness which does not go away or for any broken areas of skin. If you are not able to check your skin yourself you may need to ask a relative or carer to help you. Make sure you let your doctor or district nurse know if you think there is a problem.
- Keep your skin clean.
- Use any equipment you are given and make sure you know how to use it properly.
- Change your position frequently, preferably between bed, chair and wheelchair and standing and walking if you are able.
- If you have to stay in a chair or wheelchair relieve pressure frequently. Read on to find out simple ways to do this.
- Eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids.
- If you think you may be at risk of developing a pressure ulcer let someone know. It may be that your circumstances have changed and you need reassessing.

Relieving the Pressure

Here are some simple ways to relieve the pressure under your bottom when sitting. You should try to shift your weight 2 or 3 times an hour, for a few seconds or a few minutes depending on the manoeuvre. Remember to weight relieve frequently when you are out as well as at home.

a) Push Up Weight Shift

- Place your hands on the armrests, wheels or push rims.
- Push down through your hands until some weight is taken off your bottom. It is not necessary to lift your bottom completely clear of the seat.
- Hold the position for a few seconds.



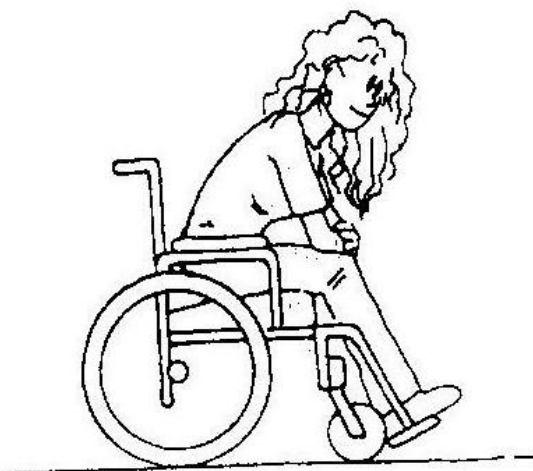
You will need fairly strong arms to perform this type of weight relief.

b) Forward weight shift

a. Resting on your knees or the arms of the chair

Please note that you should only do this weight shift on your own if you are able to sit back independently.

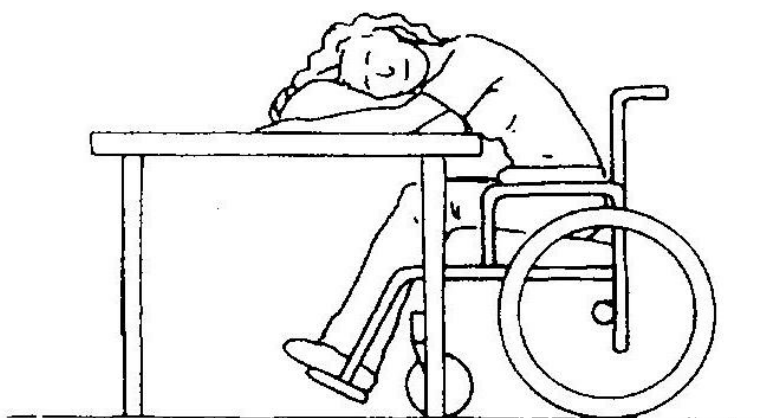
- Put the brakes on the wheelchair and make sure your castors are turned forwards to make the wheelchair stable.
- Lean forwards in the wheelchair, resting your elbows forward onto your knees or arms of the chair. If you wish you could place a cushion on your knees to rest on.
- Stay in this position for as long as you are comfortable whether that is a few seconds or a few minutes.



Remember to make sure that the wheelchair is stable and if you are on your own that you can sit back afterwards.

b. Resting on a table

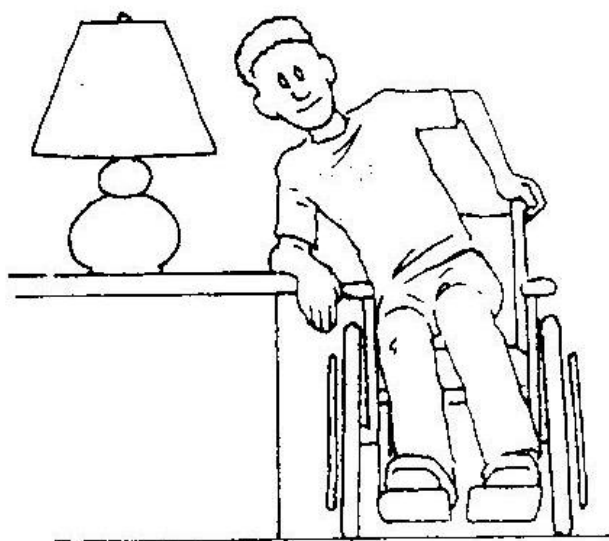
- Make sure the wheelchair brakes are on and that it is stable.
- Place a pillow on a desk or table.
- Lean forwards and rest on the pillow.
- Use the desk or table to push yourself up when finished.



This is a useful position if you tire easily. If you have a carer they could help you to get into this position.

c) Side to Side Weight Shift

- This manoeuvre relieves weight on just one buttock at a time. Make sure you lean to each side so that the weight is relieved under each buttock.
- Place your wheelchair next to a stable table or counter and place your closest forearm on it.
- Lean on the supported forearm and with your other arm braced on the armrest or push rim push up and towards the table.
- Remember to turn around and repeat the manoeuvre for the other side.



REMEMBER

Pressure ulcers can be prevented by eating well, drinking plenty of fluids, keeping your skin clean and pressure relieving at regular intervals.

Take care of any equipment issued to you and only use it as instructed.

Ensure that you read the label on your cushion to ensure it is correctly orientated in your wheelchair.

If the cover of the cushion is removed for whatever reason the cover should be put back in the correct manner because pressure ulcers have occurred due to misalignment of cushion and cover.

Avoid placing additional layers on top of your wheelchair cushion (e.g. towels, pillow cases & extra cushions) because these diminish the pressure relieving properties of the prescribed cushion.

If you think you may be developing a pressure ulcer, anywhere, you should contact your GP or District Nurse.

If you think you are developing a pressure ulcer on your bottom and regularly use a wheelchair you should also contact the Wheelchair Service.