

# Nutrition and pressure ulcers

## Information for patients

Pressure ulcers (also called pressure sores) form when there is pressure on the skin that limits the blood flow. Malnutrition, dehydration, immobility, obesity and impaired ability to eat and drink independently are all risk factors for developing pressure ulcers.

Adequate nutrition and hydration are key factors in preventing skin breakdown, which reduces the risk of pressure ulcers forming, and also improves healing rates in existing pressure ulcers.

## Nutrition

Choose a wide variety of foods to ensure adequate intake of protein, energy, vitamins and minerals.

- Include a source of protein with each meal: meat, chicken, fish, eggs, beans/pulses, dairy, soya or other vegan/vegetarian alternatives.
- Aim for at least five portions of fruit and vegetables per day for sufficient vitamins and minerals.

If your appetite is reduced:

- Try eating little and often to ensure you are getting enough energy and protein. Include five to six smaller meals and snacks, instead of three main meals over the day.
- Include two to three high protein/high energy snacks/puddings per day: yoghurt, custard, rice pudding, ice cream, cheese/avocado/dip (eg sour cream, houmous or any high calorie dip) and biscuits, or nuts and seeds.
- Include milky drinks up to three times per day: Ensure®, Complan®/Aymes® shakes, homemade milkshakes or fruit smoothies, hot chocolate or malt drinks, or plain full fat milk.
- Fortify meals like soups, casseroles, egg dishes or vegetables with cheese, oil, olive oil or sunflower spread, butter, cream, milk or milk powder.

## Hydration

Drinking enough fluid helps prevent skin breakdown and promotes good skin health.

- aim for six to eight glasses (1.5-2 litres) of fluids per day – this includes water, milk and juice or squash
- tea and coffee provide fluid, but it is limited as the caffeine causes our bodies to lose fluid
- foods like soup and jelly provide fluid and are also hydrating
- separate drinks from meal times to ensure adequate intake of each.

## Overweight and obesity

Reducing body weight helps to reduce pressure on the skin and hence formation of pressure ulcers. If you are overweight or obese:

- Include lean meat, chicken, fish and low fat dairy products to achieve adequate protein intake.
- Reduce your portion sizes.
- Avoid foods high in fat and/or sugar such as sweets, biscuits, cakes, chocolate, fizzy drinks, takeaways and fried food.

## Patients who are unable to eat or drink independently

For people who are unable to eat or drink independently, work with your family members or carers to find ways to increase your independence and stick to regular meal and drink times, which will help you to increase your food and fluid intake.

If you are a family member or carer supporting someone to eat or drink independently, please:

- Provide adapted cutlery and crockery.
- Provide assistance with feeding and encouragement with oral intake when needed.
- Make sure you provide adequate time to finish meal and drink fluids.

## More information

For more information about pressure ulcers, please read our leaflet 'Preventing pressure ulcers' leaflet: <https://bit.ly/2GfjV9c>

For more information about our nutrition and dietetics service, please visit our website: [www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/therapy-services/nutrition-and-dietetics](http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/therapy-services/nutrition-and-dietetics)

## Your feedback

If you have any comments on this leaflet or require a list of references for it, please email: [rf.communications@nhs.net](mailto:rf.communications@nhs.net).

## Alternative formats

This leaflet is also available in large print. If you need this leaflet in another format – for example Braille, a language other than English or audio – please speak to a member of staff.

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