Checking Your Skin

Pressure sores and other skin breaks or sores can happen very quickly when you are sick or injured. You and your family, along with your health care team, can prevent pressure sores by doing skin checks often. Early treatment can often prevent very serious problems.

Read the handout, Preventing Pressure Sores, to learn more.

How often should skin checks be done?

It is best to **check the skin at least two times each day**. Many people find it best to check in the morning and then again in the evening.

- Check more often if the time you spend sitting or lying down has increased.
- Check under any splints, casts or braces at least 2 times each day.

Helpful Tips

- Wash your hands with soap and water or use alcohol based hand sanitizer before and after doing skin checks.
- If you are not able to do the skin checks yourself, you will need a family member or caregiver to help you. You may be able to check the front of your body, but you may need help with your back and sides.
- A mirror with a long handle may be helpful to check some areas.
- It is best to look and touch the skin to be sure you are able to see all areas well.
What am I looking for?

- Changes in color or appearance of the skin. Areas which are more pink, red, bluish, more pale or shiny than surrounding skin.
- Blisters, bruises, cracks, scrapes or any opening in the skin surface.
- Damp or moist skin, or places where the skin is dry or flaky.

Feel the skin and compare it to surrounding skin. You want to feel for any areas that may be:

- Firm or hard
- Swollen
- Either warm or cool

Doing the Check

- Start at your head and work down to your toes.
- Check the front, back and sides of your body.
- Check any newly healed skin because it may be more sensitive and more easily injured.
- Be sure to check bony areas. These include your:
  - Head, especially the back and behind the ears
  - Shoulder blades
  - Elbows
  - Hands and fingers, especially between and under the fingers
  - Lower back
  - Buttocks
  - Hip bones
  - Tailbone or sacrum
  - Knees
  - Heels and ankles of the feet
  - Toes, including the spaces between and the bottoms of the toes
• Check under skin folds at the breasts, belly, top of the legs and buttocks.
• Check finger and toe nails for any ingrown, rough or sharp nails.
• For men who wear external catheters, check the penis for sores or rashes.

Call your doctor if you have:
• Pink, red, purple or blue areas on your skin from pressure.
• Skin over a bony area that feels firm, swollen, warm or cool compared to the skin around it.
• Any open sores, shiny areas, blisters or places where the skin has been rubbed or scraped off.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.