Top tips for the prevention and management of pressure ulcers

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Nutrition and hydration play an important role in keeping skin healthy and strong; preventing damage and helping it repair pressure ulcers and wounds, for example.

We asked some experts for their top tips for eating and drinking well to keep skin healthy and to promote healing of pressure ulcers. You can adapt these for use in your organisation or care setting.

1. Ensure you have a healthy balanced diet and adequate energy intake to prevent skin breakdown and improve healing rates
   - Carbohydrates like bread, rice, pasta, potatoes and cereal should form the basis of the diet and be eaten at each meal.
   - Make sure you are having enough protein. Try to include a source of protein, for example meat, fish, beans, pulses, eggs, dairy, soy, at each meal.
   - Eat foods rich in vitamins and minerals. Aim to have at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day.
   - More information on a healthy balanced diet

2. Stay hydrated to help stop skin becoming dry and fragile
   - Aim to have 6-8 drinks (1.6 litres) per day – this could include water, tea, coffee, milk and/or juice.
   - Include foods containing fluid: for example, soup, cereal with milk, cream, custard and fruit.
• If you lose fluid because of excessive sweating, excessive urination, fluid from a wound, diarrhoea or vomiting, you may need to increase your fluid intake.

3. **Choose foods high in energy and protein if you have a poor appetite or a medical condition where this is needed**

   • Try to eat little and often (for example three meals and two snacks a day) to ensure you are getting enough calories.

   • Try to include nutritious snacks and drinks, like cheese and biscuits, milky drinks, dairy-based puddings and fruit. Fortify foods by adding skimmed milk powder to boost protein intake.

   • Choose full-fat rather than low fat foods, for example milk, yoghurts.

   • [More information and advice from the British Dietetic Association](#)

4. **If you are overweight or obese, follow the healthy balanced diet advice above, making sure you control portion sizes**

   • Choose low-fat dairy foods and remove visible fat from meat.

   • Reduce consumption of high sugar foods, such as biscuits, cakes, chocolate, fizzy drinks, sweets.

   • Avoid ‘crash’ diets. This can affect the skin integrity or reduce its ability to heal.

   • Reduce consumption of high fat foods, such as crisps, pastries, chips.

   • [More information and advice](#).

5. **If you are helping someone who is unable to eat independently**

   • Provide adapted cutlery or crockery to support their independence.

   • Provide assistance (prompting, encouragement or feeding) when needed.
6. **If you have a pressure ulcer, these are extra steps that will help promote healing**

- Eat foods that are high in iron. These include meats, fish and eggs. Beans, pulses, green vegetables and dried fruit also contain iron but it is less readily absorbed.

- Eat foods rich in vitamins and minerals. Aim to have at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day. Vitamin C promotes iron absorption.

- If you are not able to eat a balanced diet, or have a poor appetite, aim to take a multivitamin and mineral supplement (‘A to Z’ type), available from your local pharmacy or supermarket.

- Eat high protein foods including dairy foods, meat, fish, eggs and pulses. If you are overweight choose low fat versions will still contain the same amount of protein.

7. **Other factors could increase the risk of pressure ulcers: seek advice if any apply**

- If you suffer from nausea this will reduce your ability to meet your nutritional needs.

- If you follow a consistency modified diet this can affect nutrient and fluid intake leading to weight loss and/or dehydration.

- If you have altered bowel habits you may not be absorbing all the nutrients from the food. Diarrhoea can damage the skin around the sacrum. Constipation can reduce appetite.

8. **Discuss with your local dietetic department if you have complex nutritional needs.**

- If you have a long-term condition like diabetes or renal disease, or you need consistency modified diets and fluids, please consult your dietitian, speech and language therapist or doctor before following these tips.

- If you have more than one medical condition that requires dietary change then ask to be seen by a dietitian.
Further information


Stop the Pressure

This work is part of our Stop the Pressure programme and relates specifically to the nutritional element of the SSKIN bundle.

To see the other case studies in this series, visit our Improvement Hub.

For more information on our nutrition and hydration work, email nhsi.nutritionandhydration@nhs.net

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