

# Supporting weight loss to minimise the risk of pressure ulcers: Sheffield Teaching Hospitals

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## The issue

The patient was a 45-year-old paraplegic woman who had sustained a spinal cord injury when she was 16, leaving her with lack of sensation and movement below the level of the injury. She had managed well over the previous 29 years, with no major medical issues but as her activity levels fell she had noticed that her weight gradually increasing.

One year previously she had been advised to lose weight so that she could continue to fit into her current wheelchair. She started to diet by reducing her portion sizes and cutting down on snacks between meals. For the first two months she lost weight very quickly but then at a routine medical appointment found she had developed a grade 3 pressure ulcer on her sacrum.

## The solution

The medical staff at the spinal injury unit advised the patient to discuss her diet with the dietitian at the spinal injury unit to ensure the nutritional content of her diet was adequate. She was also recommended bed rest until the sore had healed.

## Enablers and challenges

Although the rapid weight loss had made the patient feel good, the dietitian noticed the nutritional content of her diet had suffered. In particular, she was lacking carbohydrates and high iron foods. The rapid weight loss also appeared to have contributed to the deterioration of her skin condition and made it more susceptible to skin breakdown.

The dietitian introduced a suitable diet that ensured she got all macro and micronutrients, and included multivitamins. This allowed her to go on losing weight gradually but also maintained the condition of her skin.

## Impact

Although weight loss when overweight is recommended to improve general health and prevent co-morbidities, it needs to be done without compromising the skin condition.

Bed rest meant the patient had to remain in bed for some weeks. This affected her socially and with her job, and means she now has an area of skin that is more vulnerable to further damage. It also meant she could do less physically and she still cannot go swimming which she had previously enjoyed.

## Next steps and sustainability

Patients with reduced mobility benefit from maintaining a healthy weight and eating a balanced diet. If they need to lose weight it should be done gradually, paying particular attention to the balance of the diet to ensure skin integrity is not compromised.

## Want to know more?

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](mailto:nhsi.nutritionandhydration@nhs.net)