

LONG TERM CARE COMMUNITY COALITION

Advancing Quality, Dignity & Justice

PREVENTING PRESSURE ULCERS & URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS FACT SHEET FOR INDIVIDUALS LIVING AT HOME OR IN ASSISTED LIVING

Individuals living with dementia face a higher risk of developing pressure ulcers (also called bedsores) and urinary tract infections (UTIs), due to factors like reduced mobility, incontinence, and cognitive impairment. Because they may have more difficulty expressing pain or discomfort, these issues can go unnoticed until they become serious.

This fact sheet explains the risks, early warning signs, and practical strategies to help prevent pressure ulcers and UTIs and support better health, comfort, and quality of life. For more information and additional resources, please visit: <https://nursinghome411.org/dementia-care-in-the-community>.

Pressure Ulcers (Bedsores)

What They Are

Pressure ulcers are injuries to the skin and underlying tissue caused by prolonged pressure, especially over bony areas like the heels, hips, backside, and elbows. They are categorized in stages based on severity, from mild redness to deep wounds involving muscle or bone.

Risk Factors

- Limited mobility or being bedridden
- Medical conditions that affect circulation
- Poor nutrition or dehydration
- Incontinence
- Cognitive impairment (unable to express discomfort)
- Infrequent skin checks

Preventing pressure ulcers and UTIs not only avoids pain and medical complications—it also reduces hospital visits and improves comfort and dignity for people with dementia.

Prevention Strategies

1. **Reposition regularly:** Turn or reposition individuals at least every two hours to relieve pressure on vulnerable areas.
2. **Use Pressure-Relieving Devices:** Special mattresses, seat cushions, and heel protectors can help reduce prolonged pressure.
3. **Keep Skin Clean & Dry:** Cleanse skin gently with mild soap and lukewarm water. Moisturize to prevent dryness and cracking.
4. **Support Good Nutrition and Hydration:** A balanced diet rich in protein, vitamins, and fluids strengthens skin and speeds healing.
5. **Check Skin Daily:** Look for redness, swelling, or sores - especially on heels, hips, shoulders, and backside.
6. **Incontinence Management:** Promote continence through regular toileting, appropriate diet, and communication. For individuals using incontinence briefs, change wet or soiled pads promptly and protect the skin with barrier creams as needed.

- 7. Encourage Movement:** Light exercises or guided range-of-motion activities can improve circulation and reduce pressure ulcer risk.

Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)

What They Are

UTIs are infections in any part of the urinary system, including the bladder, urethra, and kidneys. They are common among people with dementia, especially those who are incontinent or unable to manage toileting independently. UTIs can worsen confusion, cause significant discomfort, and lead to serious complications if untreated.

Risk Factors

- Incontinence or difficulty with toileting
- Immobility or limited communication
- Poor hydration
- Use of urinary catheters (indwelling or intermittent)
- Inability to follow hygiene routines
- Limited access to bathrooms

Prevention Strategies

- 1. Promote Hydration:** Encourage frequent fluid intake to help flush bacteria from the urinary tract. Offer water, juice, and broth.
- 2. Establish a Toileting Routine:** Prompt regular bathroom trips and offer assistance when needed. Maintain a consistent schedule.
- 3. Practice Good Hygiene:** After incontinence episodes, clean the genital area gently using warm water and mild soap. Always wipe from front to back to prevent the spread of bacteria.

When to Seek Medical Help:

For pressure ulcers (bedsores), contact a healthcare provider if you notice redness that doesn't fade after relieving pressure, swelling or warmth in the area, pain, an open sore or blister, or skin that appears dark or blackened. Any signs of infection - such as pus, a foul odor, or fever - should be addressed promptly to prevent complications.

For urinary tract infections (UTIs), seek medical help if the individual develops a fever or chills, experiences pain or burning during urination, or if their urine becomes cloudy, dark, or bloody. A sudden increase in confusion, agitation, or unusual behavior can also signal a UTI. Pain in the lower abdomen or back may also be a warning sign.