



# Spinal Cord Injury Kit *Fact Sheet 11*

## *Taking Care of Your Skin*

### **Prevention of Skin Pressure Sores**

In order to prevent skin breakdown you must take some responsibility. Make sure you or your carer checks your whole body frequently; relieve skin pressure and take routine care of your skin. By taking the following precautions it will spot any warning signals of any problem.

Watch for any areas previously broken and healed over – scar tissue breaks easily. Any redness, blisters, opening in skin, rashes, etc. or heat in red areas will require immediate attention. It is advisable to check at least daily but morning and evening when dressing / undressing is recommended.

Remember that bony areas of the body are the most likely to have skin breakdown. Also don't forget to check your groin areas for rashes or sores from tight clothing. Men who wear an external catheter should check the penis carefully for sores and/or irritation.

Causes for skin breakdown is because your blood flows more slowly after SCI and your healing ability is therefore reduced. Your skin cannot tolerate as much pressure as before. Major causes of skin sores are: prolonged pressure; bruises or grazes; wetness on the skin; burns; sitting or lying on hard objects.

Skin damage, from pressure, usually begins on any place on the body where the bones are close to the skin surface, such as the hip. The skin will be 'pinched' between the firm inside bone and the firm outside

surface, resulting in a lack of circulation. Bruises or grazes can occur as a result of a knock or fall, transferring, etc. Many times you may not realise that an injury has occurred. Wetness of skin can be from an incontinence problem; chafing of skin; and/or perspiration. Many burns occur from heat; friction of materials; chemicals or tape; hot water; electric blankets; spillage of hot foods / drinks on skin, etc. and sometimes go unnoticed because of the loss of sensation of the person with SCI. Other things that increase your chances of pressure or skin sores are: poor nutrition; slouching in bed / wheelchair; fevers; clothing, worn out or improper equipment, etc

To prevent skin pressure:

- Use a prescribed cushion on wheelchair seat
- Do wheelchair push-ups or weight shifts every 15 minutes
- Always check skin daily
- Keep your skin healthy, clean and dry
- Maintain a health diet including adequate daily fluid intake
- Do not wear tight clothing
- **Remember:** Change position frequently as even tiny shifts of position can help eliminate pressure and prevent the skin in any one area from being compressed for too long.
- Always take immediate action if there is any concern about skin breakdown.

