

You can help reduce **your** chances of:



FALLS



PRESSURE ULCERS



CATHETER INFECTIONS



BLOOD CLOTS

Here are some simple steps you can take to help yourself or someone you care for.

BEING SAFE

Harms can be falls, pressure ulcers, catheter-acquired urinary tract infections and blood clots. At some point in our lives we may be at risk of one or more of these. This is because we may develop a sudden illness, become more frail, be diagnosed with a long-term condition or have a urinary catheter inserted. Falls, pressure ulcers, catheter-acquired urinary tract infections and blood clots can often be connected. Someone who falls may end up bed-ridden fitted with a urinary catheter and therefore at risk of developing a blood clot, a pressure ulcer or a catheter infection. The good news is, in most cases, we can reduce these risks by taking precautions and making simple changes to our lifestyle.

The best things you can do for yourself

Make sure you're eating well and having enough to drink. Try to eat a balanced diet – containing meat, fish, poultry or a vegetarian alternative; fruit and vegetables; bread; potatoes; cereals; milk and dairy products. Keep your intake of fluids regular. It's good to aim for between six and eight drinks a day. Water is best for keeping you hydrated.

So why is it important to eat and drink enough?

If you haven't eaten or drunk enough you may suffer dizzy spells and increase your risk of falling.

Weight loss is also known to play a part in the development of pressure ulcers on bony areas.

Regular drinks of water helps your catheter drain by flushing out your bladder as well as helping improve circulation by removing toxins and reducing the risk of clots.

Keep as active as you can

If you're worried about falling, moving more will help your confidence. It will also help relieve pressure on areas of skin that might be at risk of developing pressure ulcers. Flexing the calf muscles in the lower leg is proved to reduce the risk of a blood clot.

REDUCING THE RISK OF FALLS

What is a fall?

Falls can happen at any age but they are more common as we get older. Falls are very rarely an accident. In most cases there is a reason why someone falls, but there are things that we can do to reduce the risk.

What should I do if I think I'm at risk?

If you've fallen recently or have a fear of falling you're not alone. If there's no obvious reason for a fall it may be linked to a medical condition. Seek advice from your nurse or doctor straight away.

If you're admitted to hospital always tell your nurse or doctor if you have had

a fall before.

Exercises can improve your strength, balance and confidence. Any exercise is good for you – walking, gardening, swimming and chair-based exercises for example. If you are worried about walking on your own, ask someone to go with you until you feel confident again.

What can I do to help myself?

Checking your environment is safe is easy to do:

- make sure lighting is good
- there are no obstacles to trip you
- spillages are cleaned up

- clothes fit well – trousers and nighties are the right length and dressing gown belts aren't dangling
- be aware of pets and rugs.

You also need to look after yourself:

- always take your time (especially if you've just awoken or are getting up from a sitting position). If you are on certain medications this is especially important
- have your eyes tested every two years

- if you wear glasses keep them clean
- take care if you wear bifocals or varifocal glasses
- make sure your footwear fits properly
- keep toe nails trimmed.

If you need help walking make sure you have the correct equipment (for example, walking aids and grab rails). Ask your therapist, nurse or doctor if you are unsure. If you do have a fall don't panic. Call for help and do not try to get up straight away.

If you'd like to find out more log onto www.ageuk.org.uk

If you don't have access to a computer talk to a healthcare professional.

PREVENTION OF PRESSURE ULCERS

What is a pressure ulcer?

A pressure ulcer, sometimes called a pressure sore or bed sore, is an area of damage to the skin and underlying tissue caused by prolonged pressure to any part of the body from ear lobes to heels. The first signs that pressure damage may be developing is usually discoloured skin, blisters, swelling or hot/cold patches which may become progressively worse and eventually lead to an open wound.

What should I do if I think I'm at risk?

Talk to your nurse or doctor immediately. Don't wait because **pressure ulcers can develop very quickly**, sometimes within hours, and without proper care they can be very serious.

What can I or my carer do?

There are ways you can reduce the risk of developing pressure ulcers.

- **Movement.** It is important to move and change your position as often as you can to transfer your weight off bony

areas of your body such as elbows or heels. For example, rolling from side to side if in bed or standing for a few moments every half an hour if sitting. This removes pressure and helps the blood flow

- **Take control of the situation.** Check your skin for signs of pressure damage at least once a day. If skin is darker, redder or more sore than usual, do not continue to lie or sit on that area. **You should talk to either your nurse or doctor**
- **Protect your skin.** Use mild or baby soaps that do not dry out the skin. Dry carefully, without rubbing hard, especially between the toes, groin and under the breasts. Keep your skin moisturised by applying a simple moisturiser. If you suffer from incontinence wash your skin with a gentle soap immediately and pat dry. Don't be afraid to talk to your nurse or carer who will advise on how best to deal with the problem. They are there to help you.

If you'd like to find out more log onto www.your-turn.org.uk, www.nice.org.uk, www.epuap.org

If you don't have access to a computer talk to a healthcare professional.

PREVENTION OF CATHETER-ACQUIRED URINARY TRACT INFECTION

What is a catheter acquired urinary tract infection?

A catheter is a tube which is put into the bladder to drain urine from the body. Having a catheter increases the risk of infection entering the body.

The longer the catheter remains in your body the more you are at risk of getting an infection.

The decision to have a catheter should be made with your doctor or nurse after talking with them about the risks and benefits.

If you do have a catheter don't be afraid to ask your doctor or nurse if it is still needed.

What should I do to protect myself?

Always have clean hands when handling a catheter or drainage bag. Whether it's you or your carer wash hands with soap and water and always dry them properly. A doctor, nurse or carer should always wear gloves when touching your catheter or drainage bag. If this does not happen don't be afraid to tell somebody.

- The bag should be below bladder level and not touching the floor
- Regularly empty the catheter bag – when $\frac{3}{4}$ full.

What can I do to help myself?

Drink enough – six to eight non-alcoholic drinks per day. You will be encouraged and supported to manage your catheter care yourself wherever possible. This is much better for you for a number of reasons:

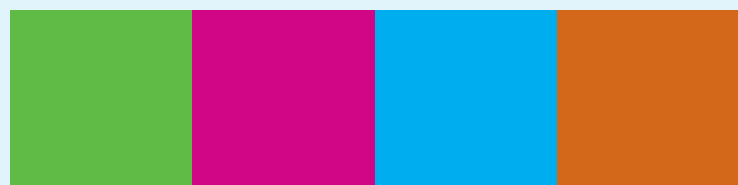
- there's less chance of developing an infection (your body has only your bugs to contend with)
- it's much more convenient and improves your independence.

Make yourself familiar with managing the bag and tubing. Wash around the area where the catheter enters your body each day with soap and water to help to keep the area clean and dry to prevent soreness. Do not apply ointment routinely. If you become sore discuss this with your nurses or carer.

When to get help

If your urine becomes smelly, cloudy, blood stained or your catheter stops draining, you have a temperature or pain contact your doctor or nurse **immediately**.

If you'd like to find out more log onto www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org
If you don't have access to a computer talk to a healthcare professional.



PREVENTION OF A BLOOD CLOT

What is a blood clot?

Normally a cut or wound forms a clot to help stop the bleeding. Blood clots can happen to anyone but are more likely if you are unwell, less active or not drinking enough non-alcoholic drinks. Blood becomes more 'sticky' and can form a clot inside a vein. You cannot see the clot because it is deep within the veins in the body, often in the legs. This is known as a deep vein thrombosis (DVT). A piece of the clot may break off and travel through the bloodstream and lodge in the lung which is serious and can be fatal. This is known as a pulmonary embolism (PE).

What should I do if I think I am at risk?

If you are known to be at risk of developing a blood clot you may have been prescribed medicines to help prevent a clot forming. You may also be given special stockings which help the circulation in your calves and legs. You should take your medicine and wear the stockings as you've been directed.

Let a doctor or nurse know immediately if you have any pain or swelling in your leg or if you suddenly become short of breath which is not normal for you.

If you need to go into hospital for any reason always tell your doctor or nurse about any medication you are taking as this may affect the treatment they need to give you to help prevent blood clots.

What can I do to help myself?

It is really important to keep the circulation moving in your lower legs. Move about as much as possible. It is a good idea to do gentle leg exercises. Try rotating your ankles around and moving your toes up and down especially if you are chair bound. If bed bound flex your feet so you can feel your calf muscles stretching.

Smoking can increase the risk of a blood clot. If you do smoke you can get help to stop. Ask a healthcare professional for information.

If you'd like to find out more log onto www.thrombosis-charity.org.uk or www.circulationfoundation.org.uk

If you don't have access to a computer talk to a healthcare professional.





PATIENT ADVICE LIAISON SERVICE (PALS)

We provide confidential advice and support, helping you to sort out any concerns you may have about the care provided by the NHS and guiding you through the different services available. Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS) can give information and help you get the best from your care. For your nearest PALS office log onto www.pals.nhs.uk. Alternatively you can check to see if your local NHS has a patient experience forum or group.

If you would like the leaflet in another language please contact your nearest PALS office.

If NHS clinical staff visit you in your own home you can expect them to observe high standards of hand hygiene. To ensure staff maintain these standards they are provided with their own hand hygiene products to use during their visit and you can expect that they will perform hand hygiene before and after undertaking hands-on care.

Don't be afraid to ask if this doesn't happen.