

Skin Care

Why it is important

Care of the skin is an important part of the overall care. The skin is the largest organ of the body. It is the immune system's first line of defense against infection.

How can I keep the skin healthy?

- Healthy skin needs to be cleaned and well hydrated.
- Wash with warm water and mild soap.
- Avoid friction or rubbing.
- Clean skin after each soiling.
- Use alcohol-free lotions on dry skin for moisturizing.
- Do not massage reddened areas.

What can be done to prevent damage to the skin?

- Encourage the person to be out of bed as tolerated.
- Avoid having person sit up straight in bed longer than necessary. This puts pressure on the buttocks and sacrum.
- Raise heels off of the bed by placing pillows under calves and knees for support.
- Change the bedbound person's position at least every two hours; one hour if in a chair.
- Remind the person to shift their own weight, if possible, every 15 minutes.
- Ask your team to show you how to use "draw" or "pull" sheets to move the person, avoiding friction from sheets.
- Keep the person's skin clean and dry.

What to report to the hospice/palliative care team

- Reddened areas that do not fade.
- Open areas or blisters on the skin.
- Any changes in the ability to turn or change the person's position. If it becomes difficult for the person to change position because of weakness or pain.

The team can advise you on special pads and mattress overlays to help prevent skin breakdown. Nutrition is important but sometimes food may overwhelm the sick person. Offer protein-rich drinks and snacks during the day as person tolerated.

Even though attentive care is provided, skin can break down because of the physical changes that occur at end of life. Skin breakdown can result from lying in bed much of the time. Other medical issues may prevent or delay healing. It is important to report any changes, redness or skin breakdown to the nurse.

The person's comfort is the goal of care.