ST. FRANCIS 24/7 CALL CENTER: (321) 269-4240

St. Francis REFLECTIONS® Hospice
Established 1977 • Licensed 1990

Skin Integrity

Skin can become fragile and prone to breakdown due to immobility, poor nutrition, or other factors.

Common skin impairments:

- **Pallor**: As circulation declines, skin may appear pale or bluish due to decreased oxygenation.
- **Dryness**: Dehydration and decreased oil production may lead to dry, flaky skin that feels tight and rough.
- **Skin Tears**: Traumatic wounds that primarily occur on the extremities as a result of friction or shearing. Due to loss of elasticity and thinned skin, tears can occur with minimal trauma.
- **Pruritus**: "Itching", may be due to medications, dry skin, and/or certain conditions.
- **Pressure Ulcer** (**Bedsore**): When skin loses its blood supply for extended periods of time the skin reddens and breaks down. Without treatment ulcers can develop.
    - Common areas of skin breakdown due to pressure:
        - Tailbones/Sacrum
        - Elbows
        - Ankles
        - Heels
        - Back of the head
        - Behind ears (due to glasses, nasal cannula)
        - Hips
        - Spine
- **Chafed Skin**: Irritation caused by heat, moisture, or friction. Chafed skin typically occurs in areas where there are skin folds (i.e. groin, under breasts, or abdomen).

Common signs and symptoms to monitor for:

- Redness or discoloration that doesn't fade with pressure

- Blisters or open sores
- Areas that feel warm, spongy, or hard
- Pain or tenderness over bony areas
- Dry, flaky, or cracked skin

Tips for Skin Integrity Management:

Prevention is critical. Wounds can be difficult to treat once they develop and may become infected.

- **Regular Position Changes:** Turn and reposition the patient every two (2) hours and as needed to relieve pressure on vulnerable areas (back, heels, elbows, hips). Use pillows or foam wedges to support and offload pressure. Use "pull" or "draw" sheets to move patient to avoid friction from sheets. Do not push or pull on boney prominences, shoulders and hips.
- **Skin Care:** Keep the skin clean and dry and complete routine skin checks. Use gentle cleansers and pat the skin dry, especially in areas prone to moisture (groin, underarms). Apply moisturizing lotions to prevent dryness. Do not apply heat or massage to reddened areas.
- **Pressure Relieving Devices:** Use specialized mattresses, cushions, or pads designed to reduce pressure. Keep bedding clear, dry and free from wrinkles. Wear long sleeves or long pants to protect the skin from trauma.
- **Nutrition and Hydration:** Encourage a balanced diet and adequate fluid intake as tolerated to support skin health. Consult the hospice team for nutritional supplements if necessary.

Even with the most attentive care, patients may still develop skin problems due to their declining condition.

Record and Report to St. Francis:

- Changes in skin condition (i.e. redness, breakdown, or sores)
- Inflammation, warmth, pain or swelling of the skin
- Irritated, itching or reddened areas of the skin

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St. Francis Reflections is always available to assist with any questions or concerns 24/7

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