



## Device-related pressure ulcers: Avoidable or not?

A medical device-related pressure ulcer (MDRPU) is defined as a localized injury to the skin or underlying tissue resulting from sustained pressure caused by a medical device, such as a brace; splint; cast; respiratory mask or tubing; tracheostomy tube, collar, or strap; feeding tube; or a negative-pressure wound therapy device. The golden rule of pressure ulcer treatment is to identify the cause of pressure and remove it. Unfortunately, many of the medical devices are needed to sustain the patient's life, so they can't be removed.

But does that mean MDRPUs aren't avoidable? Yes—and no. Some aren't avoidable, but not as many as you might think. Many result not from the device itself but from poor device positioning or securement. Some result from simple failure to check under the tubing or device. These causes are avoidable. Preventive practices include frequently evaluating device positioning and securement. Also, if possible, loosen the device at least once per shift to check for skin problems.

The National Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel has created four “Best Practices for Prevention of Medical Device-Related Pressure Ulcers” posters, which can be **downloaded** for free. Besides a general poster, you'll find posters for the specialties of critical care, pediatrics, and long-term care. Each poster features photos of MDRPU-related injuries and prevention strategies such as:

- Choose the correctly sized medical device for the individual.
- Cushion and protect the skin with dressings in high-risk areas.

- Remove or move the device daily to assess skin.
- Avoid placing the device over the site of a previous or existing pressure ulcer.
- Educate staff on the correct use of devices and prevention of skin breakdown.
- Be aware of edema under the device and the potential for skin breakdown.
- Confirm that the device isn't placed directly under a patient who's bedridden or immobile.

Of course, even when caregivers focus on prevention, mistakes can happen. Unfortunately, mistakes are a part of life. But that doesn't mean we can't learn from our mistakes to better protect our patients. When a mistake occurs, determine what happened, correct it, and take steps to prevent it from happening again. That's our job as clinicians and as patient advocates.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donna Sardina".

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### Selected references

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