



HEALTH AWARENESS

First, Do No Harm: Help For Caregivers

(NAPSA)—According to government statistics collected by the National Family Caregivers Association, more than 50 million people in the U.S. care for an elderly, disabled or chronically ill family member or friend.

Pressure ulcers, better known as bedsores, and diabetic ulcers on the lower legs and feet can be tremendous challenges for caregivers and put a loved one at risk for further disability or illness.

“If pressure and diabetic ulcers are left untreated they can be life threatening, and caregivers often don’t realize the danger until an ulcer develops,” says Robert S. Kirsner, M.D., Ph.D., professor of dermatology at the University of Miami.

As chair of the Medical Advisory Board of National Healing Corporation, which manages wound healing centers nationwide, Kirsner is on the leading edge of wound care and urges caregivers to be proactive. He suggests adding the following preventative steps to the daily caregiving routine:

- **Inspect:** In light-skinned individuals, the first visible sign of a pressure ulcer is a red area on the skin that doesn’t fade. Dark-skinned persons may first notice persistent areas of red, blue or purple with a different skin temperature or texture and that are often accompanied by pain or itching.

- **Feet First:** In caring for diabetics, check the feet and between toes for blisters, cuts and scratches.

- **Don’t Use Donuts:** Use commercially available pressure-reducing cushions and mattresses but avoid those that resemble egg-crate foam. Place a pillow under the calves to prevent heels from touching the bed and use pillows



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and foam wedges to keep ankles and knees apart.

- **Avoid Excessive Moisture:** In treating incontinence, cleanse skin, use a topical moisture barrier and select absorbent briefs or under pads that provide a quick-drying surface to the skin.

- **Easy Does It:** Use mild soaps and water when bathing and apply skin moisturizers to prevent dryness.

- **Sit Properly:** Conditions that prevent blood flow contribute to chronic wounds, and sitting with crossed legs can cause pressure on the nerves and blood vessels.

- **Keep Moving:** People with immobility challenges should change position every 15 minutes when sitting and at least every two hours in bed. Be gentle and avoid friction, which could damage the skin.

- **Seek Medical Treatment:** Seek medical attention if a chronic wound has not healed in 30 days or shows signs of infection. To find a wound healing center near you, visit www.nationalhealing.com.