

**Spinal Seating Professional Development Program  
Reference Document RD13.1: Handy Hints for Taking Care of Skin****Handy Hints for Taking Care of Skin****Skin environment and injury**

Tissue injuries or red marks caused by mechanical loading of the skin, burns, insect bites, unsuitable skin environment such as high temperature or humidity, restricted airflow, can at times be difficult to distinguish from pressure injuries. Knowing the cause of tissue injury can provide guidance to an appropriate management plan and prevent future episodes. Regardless of the cause, it is important to respond and monitor to any tissue integrity issues, and it may be necessary to liaise with other professionals to assist.

**Taking care of skin**

1. Check skin at least once a day. Use a mirror and/or torch to see the skin. If the client is unable to check themselves, instruct others on how to check skin for existing or potential skin breakdown.
2. Maintain good hygiene. Keep skin clean with a liquid pH-balanced cleanser and wash gently with warm water. Dry properly after showers with soft towels. Pay attention to the groin, between the buttocks and in between toes. This is important after swimming. Special care needs to be taken to ensure incontinence episodes are managed as soon as possible.
3. Maintain a regular toileting regime. Ensure incontinence episodes are managed as soon as possible. Consult with a continence specialist for management.
4. Wear loose fitting clothes and fabrics with some stretch and avoid clothes with thick seams. Wear clothes that are appropriate for the weather. Tight fitting clothes can damage the skin. Avoid wearing garments with pockets, studs or buttons that will be in contact with seating support surfaces. Wear soft cotton garments if possible to manage moisture build-ups on the skin.
5. Avoid sitting in wheelchairs with leg adduction / internal hip rotation to manage heat and moisture issues around the inner thigh area
6. Moisturise skin with pH-balanced lotion and do not overuse powders & creams. Powders can turn into tiny hard balls when moist and may potentially cause damage. Too much cream can make skin 'soggy', causing it to breakdown
7. Shoes should be worn to protect the feet. Wear correctly fitting shoes to avoid in-grown toenails. Larger shoes, with soft material, should be considered for clients with lower limb oedema.
8. Maintain a healthy diet. If appropriate, a dietician could be involved to aid in developing a healthy diet.
9. Stop smoking. Smoking is well known to limit the effective supply of oxygen to vascular tissue, increasing the risk of tissue damage.

**Resources:**

["How to look after your skin"](#) SpinalHub, Victorian Spinal Cord Injury Program, accessed 2016.

["Preventing and treating pressure sores: a guide for people with spinal cord injuries"](#), Page 17, Bowman, T. Spinal Cord Injury Ontario, 2015