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Foam Mattress Overlay

Purpose

Mattress overlays are support surfaces that are placed on top of a bed mattress in order to reduce the pressure applied to the surface of the skin. By reducing pressures to the skin areas around bony parts of the body, these support surfaces can promote comfort and reduce the factors that contribute to the breakdown of skin. Mattress overlay products should only be used as part of a comprehensive wound/skin care program. Make sure you read and understand all manufacturers' use and care instructions.

Types

Mattress overlays come in three basic models: foam, gel, and air. This instruction sheet will discuss foam models. Foam mattress overlays come in many different thicknesses, densities and coverings. Each type of foam mattress overlay has a specific function.

Pressure ulcers form where bones cause the greatest force on the skin and tissue, squeezing them against an outside surface. This may be where bony parts of the body press against other body parts such as occurs when on a mattress, or in a chair for extended periods of time. In persons who must stay in bed, most pressure ulcers form on the lower back below the waist (sacrum), the hip bone (trochanter), and on the heels. In people in chairs or wheelchairs, the exact spot where pressure ulcers form depends on the sitting position. Pressure ulcers can also form on the knees, ankles, shoulder blades, back of the head, and spine.

Use

Foam mattress overlays are placed on top of a mattress and are covered by a bed sheet; the patient does not lie directly on the foam pad. To make sure the patient is not completely compressing the foam overlay, slide the flat portion of your hand between the foam overlay and the mattress of the bed to be sure there is space between the overlay and the bed surface. In order to be effective the foam overlay cannot be compressed to the point where the body is in contact with the surface below the foam overlay. Using a pressure reducing support surface does not eliminate the need to turn the patient on a regular schedule. Some overlay manufacturers develop special turning schedules for their support surfaces. The backside of this education sheet has an example of a patient turning schedule.

Patients that use support surfaces in the home should have home health professionals evaluating their skin on a regular basis. These health care professionals will develop and implement an individualized program of skin care that should be followed. Factors of patient mobility, incontinence, and nutrition must also be considered when deciding on what type of pressure relieving support surface to use.

Maintenance

Most foam pressure reducing support surfaces will breakdown over time because of the pressure of use. The lifespan of your foam overlay can be increased by rotating and flipping it regularly. Follow the manufacturer guidelines when it comes to rotating your foam overlay. Most foam support surfaces should be replaced every 6 – 9 months.

24-HOUR TURNING CLOCK

