

### **Preventive care for skin tears**

Aging changes in the skin increase the risk of skin tears in elderly persons.

The following are specific risk factors for skin tears that CNAs should be aware of to supplement their pressure ulcer knowledge:

- Over age 85
- Altered sensory status (hearing, vision, or sensation)
- Ambulates independently
- History of previous skin tears
- Tendency to bruise
- Dependent for ADLs
- Use of adjunctive equipment (e.g., a wheelchair or mechanical lift)
- Poor nutrition
- Altered mental state (e.g., dementia)
- Altered neuromuscular status (e.g., contractures)
- Polypharmacy

Your facility should have a policy describing how to identify patients who are at risk for skin tears.

The following are preventive approaches to consider when developing this plan:

- Use emollient soap.
- Provide a safe environment. Think safety when you enter and leave the patient's room and correct problems.
- Provide good lighting to reduce the risk of bumping into equipment or furniture.
- Learn how to manage patients with frail skin. Friction, shearing, sudden rough, harsh movement, or pulling can create a skin tear.
- Use moving, positioning, turning, and transferring techniques to prevent friction or shear.
- Use a lift sheet to move and turn patients.
- Use transfer techniques that prevent friction or shear.

Use a sliding board and cover it with a pillowcase to avoid contact with bare skin. Consider using a mechanical lift.

- Make sure the patient is wearing glasses and hearing aid, if used. Keep these items clean.
- Provide a safe area for wandering.
- Provide good nutrition and hydration. Offer fluids between meals, and monitor and evaluate intake and output if fluid intake is marginal or insufficient.
- Monitor the patient's appetite, and call the dietician promptly if overall inadequate or the patient has significant weight loss. Do a three-day calorie count in anticipation of the dietician's visit.
- If a patient's appetite is consistently greater than 75% and there is no significant weight loss, obtain a dietary consult during the next regularly scheduled visit.