

Pressure relief, reduction and redistribution

Q. What is the difference between; pressure relief, pressure reduction and pressure redistribution?

A. Pressure relief is the periodic removal of pressure to allow reperfusion of the capillary bed. The pressure relief allows blood flow to return to normal and re-perfuse tissue that has been starved of blood due to the pressure being exerted on it. By changing position we naturally allow this to happen. Pressure relieving support surfaces actively encourage tissue perfusion by inflating and deflating alternative air cells over a 10 minute cycle, so pressure over any one part of the body in contact with the surface changes regularly.

Pressure reduction is achieved by reducing contact pressure at the skin/mattress interface through increasing surface area over which the patient is supported and the mattresses contour to the shape of the body. The patient will still need to be repositioned on such a surface, as even low pressures can occlude the capillary network, particularly in a high risk individual.

Evidence to support both pressure relief and pressure reduction is provided in the Clinical Evidence – Optimising and Measuring Clinical Outcomes Brochure (Lit 444/04) and the Principles of Alternating Pressure brochure (Lit 932/01).

Pressure redistribution is a blanket term for both types of pressure management as described above. Although the terminology looks interchangeable, it can have important implications in some countries e.g. USA where it can be linked to different reimbursement codes.

These FAQ's have been developed to answer common questions which arise during clinical practice and in the market place when clinical evidence is scarce. It is important to consider the holistic care of the patient and use clinical judgement making decisions based on the answers. If you can not find an answer for which you are looking, please email karen.milton@arjohuntleigh.com with your question(s) and we will endeavour to answer it/them and make it/them available to help educate others.