

# Fit for Life Independent



## Pressure care and the use of pressure cushions

The occurrence of pressure areas have the obvious negative physical effects to patients/residents but in addition a massive financial cost due mainly to the amount of nursing time required to treat and resolve a pressure area successfully (Bennett et al., 2004). Thankfully 95% of ulcers can be avoided using best practice guidelines including the use of pressure cushions.

Ideally an appropriately trained allied healthcare professional will prescribe a suitable pressure cushions for residents at high risk but this may not always be the case or be a viable short term option.

In addition even when residents are prescribed cushions a lot of the problems that we see occur after a cushion has been prescribed which can often lead to an exacerbation and not a resolution of a pressure area.

### Common errors in the use of pressure cushions

Regardless of the quality of the cushion or the accuracy of the pressure care assessment and care plan put in place, incorrect and/or inappropriate use of a pressure cushion can create real problems.

Some of the common errors that we see on a day to day basis include:

- Incorrect orientation of the cushion – Cushion placed **back to front** or upside down. This can greatly exacerbate pressure areas especially in high risk residents and is the **most** common error.
- Inappropriate prescription of cushion – e.g high/med risk resident with a standard foam cushion
- Incorrect size of cushion
- Worn or damaged cushions being used
- Prescribed cushions being used by multiple users
- Pressure cushions being placed **on top** of existing cushion

Therefore it seems logical that all of your team should be aware of the different types of pressure cushions and the correct way to use them and if they are suitable to residents' profile types.

## Effects of sitting posture

When we are sitting 75% of our body weight is supported on 8% of our total body surface area. (Trumble 1930). The pressure distribution over this body surface area is broken down as follows:

- Buttocks - 75%
- Feet - 19%
- Back - 4%
- Arms - 2%

It is then no wonder that in addition to ensuring that your residents are sitting in the right chair it is equally important to ensure that they have the correct type of cushion especially if they are incapable of repositioning themselves.

## Pressure Cushion Types

There are many different types and variations of cushions from lots of different companies but here's a **brief overview** of the most common types of cushions that we see in our Nursing Homes.

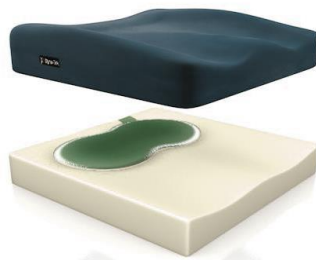
There are four main materials used in pressure care relief which are 'standard' foam, viscoelastic (**memory foam**), gel and air cushions. These materials are then used either separately or combined to form different types of cushions to offer variations of pressure relief.

In addition to the materials used in the cushions the final aspect is to how cushions must be used:

- **'Anyway** – i.e it makes no difference what way the cushion is used. These cushions are the same material all the way through. The **only** 'anyway' cushions are either made of 'standard foam' or 'viscoelastic' (memory foam)
- **Castellated/Integral pockets** – these cushion provide increased air circulation and must be used the correct way up.
- **Two layers** – Can be a combination of materials but it is essential that the correct material is on the 'TOP'(see below)
- **Contoured** – These cushions have specific areas for the legs and the buttocks and **must be used** correctly
- **Air Only** – These cushions are used for very high risk residents and are either controlled by alternating system or multiple air sacs – **must be specifically prescribed**



**1. Integral Pockets- Foam**  
Low/Med Risk



**2. Contoured - Visco + Gel**  
High Risk(Support)



**Anyway- Viscoelastic**  
Med/High Risk



**4. Castellated- Two layer - foam**  
Low/Med Risk



**5. Air - Automated**  
Very High Risk



**6. Castellated/Contoured Foam + Gel**  
Med/High Risk(Support)

### What can your team do to improve the use of pressure cushions?

1. Educate your all of your team on the importance of correct use of pressure cushions
2. Ensure that your residents are sitting on appropriate cushions i.e Standard foam cushions **only** appropriate for low risk residents.
3. Review all current pressure cushions to ensure that they are being used correctly. i.e remove covers if necessary **as instructions on covers are useless** if the covers are replaced incorrectly by someone who is not aware of the cushions correct orientation.\*
4. Mark/Label the actual cushions (not covers) with front/back and Top/Bottom
5. Ensure that when a cushion is prescribed that **your team** are aware of the importance of the actual orientation of the cushion
6. Regularly wash/clean cushion covers using **point 4** to ensure covers replaced correctly.
7. Cushions like any other equipment must be reviewed on a cycle basis and discarded when appropriate (low cost foam cushions have and average 6 month lifespan)

\*this is a very common occurrence

### Some simple tips when reviewing cushions

Q. How do you know if a cushion is standard foam or viscoelastic?

Answer- Simply press down on the cushion with the palm of your hand (see image 3). If the cushion returns to its shape immediately its foam if it slowly returns it is viscoelastic.

Q. What if your not sure which way around a cushion should be?

Answer - Sit on it yourself, if you don't find it comfortable an older person won't either. Or look at images 2 and 6 which shows the area for the buttocks at the **back** and two grooves for thighs at the **front**.

**We hope this information helps in some way but please feel free to contact us with questions or queries on any of the content. Click [here](#) if you would like to download a printable version of this newsletter or any of our previous newsletters.**



## About us

Since 2001 Fit For Life has been empowering our adult and ageing population to remain as active and independent as possible to ensure that they achieve and maintain the best quality of life possible.

Fit For Life provide an extensive range of specialised training for healthcare professionals, therapists and carers to improve the care and wellbeing for the older adult and elderly population. Other services include, risk assessments, audits and reports, building and environment recommendations, and independent living services.

We pride ourselves on the team we have working with our older population and we are very excited to share our knowledge and expertise with you to ensure our older population receive best practice care.

Some of the areas of specialised training we deliver include:

- [Manual Handling – Mandatory, Refresher, and non-people manual handling courses](#)
- [Advanced Hoist and Sling Workshops](#)
- [Falls Prevention - Common Risk Factors, Falls Policy, System and Audits](#)
- [Group Exercise Delivery - Foundation Level, Dementia specific and advanced falls prevention](#)
- [Sitting posture, seating, positioning](#)
- [Pressure care and cushions](#)
- [Positioning and repositioning](#)
- [Transfers and Mobilising](#)
- [Stroke Positioning and Handling](#)
- [Restraints](#)