



Skin Integrity and Medications: A Closer Look

As we age, the skin becomes thinner, more vulnerable to damage and stress, and slower to heal.¹ Therefore, elderly patients are more prone to interruptions of skin integrity and the development of wounds, such as pressure ulcers, than younger patients.²

A wound occurs whenever there is a break or cut in the skin or mucous membrane as a result of physical injury or surgical procedure.³ Many patients, especially the elderly, are taking multiple medications for chronic conditions, which could affect wound healing or development. Some medications can impair or improve wound healing (see table below).^{4,5}

A pressure ulcer is a type of wound caused by unrelieved pressure on the skin. This generally happens when the body remains in the same position for an extended period of time, e.g., in bed or in a wheelchair. Pressure ulcers usually develop over bony prominences, such as the elbow, heel, hip, shoulder, back, and back of the head.⁶ Patients with cognitive impairment, immobility, or both are at higher risk of developing a pressure ulcer.⁷ Certain medications can affect alertness and mobility (see table below), which could possibly decrease an individual's ability to change positions in response to pressure.

Medications That Can... ^{4,5,8}		
Impair Wound Healing	Improve Wound Healing	Alter Alertness
Antibiotics	Growth factors	Anticonvulsants
Anticoagulants	Hemorrhheologics	Antidepressants
Antineoplastics	Pentoxifylline & other methylxanthines	Antiemetics
Antiplatelets	Phenytoin	Antihistamines
Antirheumatoid arthritis drugs	Prostaglandins	Antipsychotics
Colchicine	Retinoids	Anxiolytics
Immunosuppressants	Sex hormones	Opioid analgesics
Nicotine	Vitamin A	Skeletal muscle relaxants
Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs	Vitamin C	
Topical corticosteroids	Zinc	
Vasoconstrictors		

*This table may not be inclusive of all drug classes that affect skin integrity.

Although many of these drugs are essential for the patient's continuing health, it is important to realize they can have an effect on wound healing. Therefore, wound management is an opportunity for a medication review.⁹

This fact sheet is a resource for use in the management of skin integrity. It serves as a guide and may not apply to all patients and all clinical situations. The information presented is not intended to override a clinician's judgment.



References

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