

# Stirling's Pressure Ulcer/Sore Severity Scale (SPSSS)

## Assessment Overview

### Assessment Area

**ICF Domain:**

Body Function

**Subcategory:**

Functions of the Skin

### You Will Need

**Scoring:**

The scale has 5 stages (0-4), where zero represents no clinical appearance and four indicates full thickness skin loss with extensive destruction extending to bone, tendon or joint capsule.

The two-digit version includes more detailed ulcer descriptors.

**Training:**

To ensure basic understanding of skin and soft tissue anatomy and relevant physiological concepts, practitioners should undergo training prior to using the scale.

### Summary

Stirling's Pressure Ulcer Severity Scale is used to describe the severity of pressure ulcers. It was derived from previously published UK scales developed by a consensus panel of national tissue viability experts.

This clinician-administered observational scale has 5 stages ranging from stage 0 to stage 4, where:

0 = no clinical evidence of a pressure sore

1 = discoloration of the intact skin

2 = partial-thickness skin loss or damage involving epidermis and/or dermis

3 = full-thickness skin loss involving damage or necrosis of subcutaneous tissue but not extending to underlying bone, tendon or joint capsule

4 = full-thickness skin loss with extensive destruction and tissue necrosis extending to bone, tendon or capsule.

The scale has several variations, with the most common being the 1 and 2-digit scales, where the nature and severity of the ulcer are graded.

### Availability

Can be downloaded from "Stirling's Pressure Ulcer / Sore Severity Scale (SPSSS)" page.

## Assessment Interpretability

### Minimal Clinically Important Difference

Not established in SCI

### Statistical Error

Not established in SCI

### Typical Values

Distribution of pressure ulcers using the Stirling wound classification:

|              | Frequency (%)   |
|--------------|-----------------|
| Stage 1      | 3 (5.4)         |
| Stage 2      | 12 (21.4)       |
| Stage 3      | 37 (66.1)       |
| Stage 4      | 4 (7.1)         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>56 (100)</b> |

(Wellard et al. 2000; n=60, mixed injury types, admission to hospital with 1+ pressure ulcers, mean (SD) length of stay in hospital = 91 (98) days)



## Measurement Properties

### Validity – **Low** to **Moderate**

*When the scales were treated as continuous variables:*

**Low to Moderate** correlation with:

Norton scale:  $\rho = -0.28$

Waterlow scale:  $\rho = 0.38$

Braden scale:  $\rho = 0.03$

*When the scales were treated as categorical variables  
(e.g. at risk, high risk, very high risk):*

**Low to Moderate** correlation with:

Norton scale:  $\rho = 0.14$

Waterlow scale:  $\rho = 0.32$

Braden scale:  $\rho = -0.08$

(Wellard et al. 2000; n=60, mixed injury types, admission to hospital with 1+ pressure ulcers, mean (SD) length of stay in hospital = 91 (98) days)

**Number of studies reporting validity data: 1**

### Reliability

Not established in SCI

## Responsiveness

### Floor/Ceiling Effect:

Not established in SCI

### Effect Size:

Not established in SCI

**Number of studies reporting  
responsiveness data: 0**