



Scar Process

A scar is a mark left on the skin after a wound or injury has healed. Scars develop as part of the normal healing process. They can take up to two years to fully mature and during the maturation process they may be firm, raised and pink. These signs settle as the scar matures, particularly over the first 6-12 months. Wounds that are expected to take more than three weeks to heal spontaneously, may be considered for specialist plastic surgery intervention, such as skin grafting, to promote faster and better quality healing.

Once the wound is healed, there are treatments available that can improve the appearance and prevent scar related complications.

Sometimes abnormal scarring can occur:

Hypertrophic Scars – are ‘over-reactive’ scars that occur more commonly in red- or fair-haired individuals, especially around joints and in the younger age groups. They can be exacerbated by infection. These are unusually raised, firm and itchy with purple or red discoloration, but they do not extend beyond the original boundary of the wound. They normally settle spontaneously.

Keloid Scars – are excessively large scars growing out with the boundaries of the initial injury. They are more common in darker skinned people and in certain regions of the body, and there is a genetic susceptibility. Keloid scars take time to appear and can keep growing. They do not usually resolve without intervention and can be resistant to treatment and prone to recurrence.

Contractures – all scars contract as they heal. When they overly a join, this contracture can limit the movement of the joint or cause discomfort. It is important to treat contractures in order to:

- Improve their appearance and regain joint movement.
- Reduce the scar sensitivity, tightness, dryness and discomfort.



Treatment

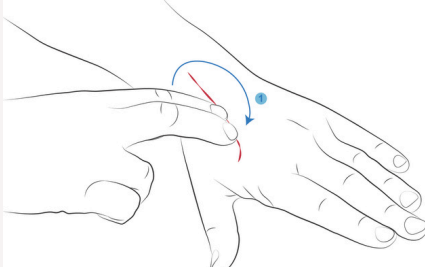
There are several treatments that can be used for scar management:

Moisturising

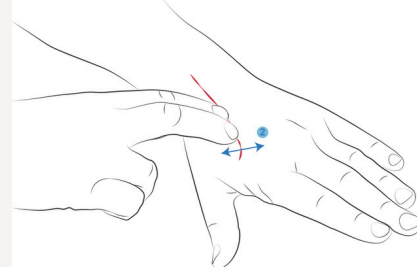
Healed scars require regular moisturising to prevent the area from drying, cracking and becoming sore. It is important to use a non-perfumed, oil-based moisturising cream i.e. Zerobase, E45, Nivea (perfumed creams can react with newly healed / sensitive skin). Moisturiser should be applied gently, in thin layers and should be applied 2-3 times a day. It is important to cleanse the area between applications to avoid a build-up of cream and irritate the skin.

Massage

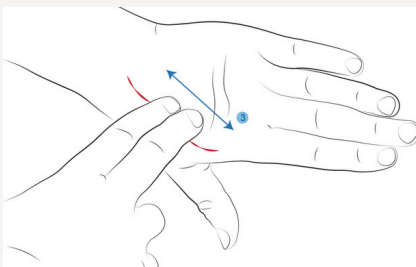
Massage can help to soften and flatten scar tissue by breaking down scar tissue collagen and promoting remodelling. It can also help control itching and reduce the sensitivity of the scar. When a scar has matured it will become paler, flatter and softer. Once the wound is completely healed you can start massage 2-3 times a day, for about 5 minutes each time. Apply a small amount of non perfumed moisturiser to the scar and use gentle motions with the pad of your thumb or fingers around the scar, in all directions so that the skin moves on the underlying scar tissue as shown below:



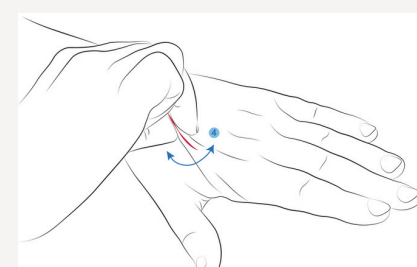
Make small circles over scar



Up and down over the length of the scar



Side to side along the length of the scar



Lift and roll the skin around the scar between your fingertips

Apply as much pressure as you can without it hurting, beginning with light pressure and progress to deeper and firmer pressure.

Exercises

The aim of any exercises is to regain, maintain or improve the range of movement and function of the affected body part. This will also gently build strength and tolerance of the use of the body part.



Silicone sheets and gels

This treatment acts by sealing in moisture and hydrating the scar to flatten, soften and reduce scar discolouration.

Pressure garments

These are made to measure elasticated pressure clothing fitted accurately to apply constant pressure to the scarred areas with the aim of promoting scars that are flat, soft, pale and comfortable.

Splints - To limit scar tissue, support or immobilise an injured body and to limit or prevent joint contracture (skin tightening).

Laser treatment – to flatten and reduce scar discolouration.

Sun Protection

As scars are extremely sensitive to sunlight / sun exposure, it is important they are protected from the sun. Sun cream protects the skin from harmful UVA and UVB radiation. The Skin Protection Factor (SPF) should be 30 -50 with a UVA star rating of 4 or above. Sun cream should be reapplied every 2 hours and after exposure to water, sweat or towel drying. Some medications can also cause photo-sensitivity, increasing the risk of burning. Extra care should be taken in the sun for the next 2 years.

When to seek advice

If your scar becomes swollen, painful or hot contact your GP for an appointment.

Support

If a scar is more severe or bothering you, your GP may be able to recommend treatments or refer you to a specialist.

Resources you may find useful are:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/scars

www.changingfaces.org.uk/



SCAN ME



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