

## Scar management; advice for patients following plastic and reconstructive surgery

### Will I have a scar following my surgery?

When the skin is damaged following an operation, you will be left with a scar. During the initial healing phase blood supply to the tissues is increased, which cause scars to look a deep red or purple in colour. With time, this blood supply will reduce and the scar will become paler in colour.

Occasionally the scar may appear thickened or raised. This is known as a hypertrophic scar and is more likely if the wound took some time to heal.

10-15% of the population (10 – 15 in 100 people) are also at risk of developing a keloid scar. Keloids are an overgrowth of scar tissue that appear darker, rounded, thick and bulky. They may not develop until months after the wound is healed and if you have had a keloid scar before, it is likely you will develop another.

Unfortunately with any scar, it is normal to experience pain, hypersensitivity, itching and tightness. These can be triggered by a number of factors, but with good scar management and medication these symptoms can be improved.

### How can I improve the appearance of my scar?

As soon as your wound is healed, massaging the skin with a simple moisturiser can improve the appearance of the scar. Massage can also assist in treating tight, dry, itchy and bumpy skin, as the scar tissue itself does not produce oil or sweat.

We recommend massaging the area 3 - 4 times a day in firm circular motions until the cream is absorbed. This usually takes around 5 minutes. The pressure should be light to begin with and more pressure should be applied as your skin gets used to the massage. You should aim to make the scar blanch (pale) during massage for the best effect.

### The recommended creams for scar massage are:

- E-45
- Diprobase
- Nivea
- Cocoa butter.



If you find any of these creams create a reaction, you should stop using them immediately and speak to your Plastics link nurse.

It is also very important to clean your skin thoroughly every day to prevent a build-up of cream, as this can lead to skin irritation.

Newly healed skin is also at risk of UV damage, which can leave scars with a permanently darker tint and increased risk of skin cancer. To prevent this, skin must be protected from sun exposure using factor 50 sun cream or clothing such as a sunhat or long sleeved t shirt, for at least two years.

### **Are there any other treatments available to manage my scar?**

For patients who might be suffering with hypertrophic or keloid scars, there are other options available. Some treatments are expensive and not widely available on the NHS, so will need to be paid for privately.

All treatments should be discussed with your Consultant or Plastics link nurse before starting, as they may not be suitable for all patient groups and can make some scar types worse. More information on these treatments can be found on the NHS website:

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/scars/treatment/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/scars/treatment/)

### **Contact details**

Please call your specialist nurse if you have any questions:

Plastics Nurse Specialists

Chelsea: 020 7811 8318 / 0207 352 8171 ex. 1573

Sutton: 020 7352 8171 ex. 4345

Alternatively, please call:

**The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline:** 020 8915 6899

(Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

