

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 this can take up to 18 months. 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 or there is tension on the site.

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.

What symptoms might I get from my scar?

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. This should be started once all the scabs are gone.

Moisturisers are best over oils, as they add moisture to your skin, helping to treat tight, dry, itchy and bumpy skin, as the scar tissue itself does not produce oil or sweat.

The pressure should be light to begin with and more gentle 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. Do not use harsh pressure, as this can increase the production of scar tissues.



The recommended creams for scar massage are:

- Aveeno skin relief moisturising lotion
- Diprobase cream
- CeraVe moisturising face and body cream with Hyaluronic acid and essential ceramides for dry to very dry skin
- Epimax
- Neutrogena hydro boost body gel cream moisturiser for normal to dry skin

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.

Scar camouflage and massage is also available privately and your consultant or plastic surgery link nurse will be able to provide you with reputable resources for this.

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/

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 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.

