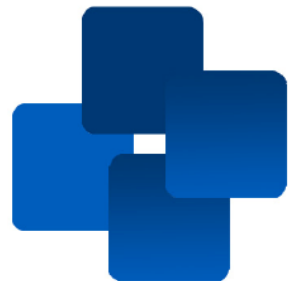


Patient Information

Scar Tissue and Massage

Department of Plastic Surgery



What is a scar?

A scar is a mark left on the skin after a wound or injury has healed. Scars are a natural part of the healing process. Most will fade and become paler over time, although they never completely disappear.

How does a scar form?

When stitches are removed from a wound, the scar is normally a very thin line. Although the skin has healed (stuck) together at this stage, it is still not very strong.

When the skin is wounded, the tissues break, which causes a protein called collagen to be released. Collagen builds up where the tissue is damaged, helping to heal and strengthen the wound. New collagen continues forming for several months and the blood supply increases, causing the scar to become red, raised and lumpy; at times the wound may itch. Both the redness and itching can be more noticeable in hotter weather, particularly if the scar has been exposed to strong sunlight.

Between 3-6 months, the scar is usually at its worst but its appearance should start to improve from now on.

Over the following 6-12 months, the scar will gradually become smoother, softer and paler. Although scars are permanent, they can fade over a period of up to two years. It's unlikely they'll fade anymore after this time.

These changes vary from person to person. In general, the younger you are, the longer the scar takes to settle down. Fair skin wounds also take longer to settle. If the wound is constantly being stretched it will also remain red and lumpy for longer. Occasionally the scar may remain red, stretched, itchy, thickened and lumpy. In darker skin toned individuals, the scar may be hyperpigmented (dark brown).

What can I do to help improve the scar?

Firm massaging of the scar certainly helps to speed up the normal changes but because the scar is still weak in the early stages it is probably best not to start doing this until one month after your operation.

If you are advised to start massaging earlier than this by your doctor, then you must only do this lightly at first, building up to a firm massage over a couple of weeks.

Avoid exposing the scar to strong sunlight during the first six months after surgery. If you need to go in the sun, use a high factor sunscreen or cover the scar with an adhesive dressing.

Wherever possible avoid stretching the scar. If at times this cannot be avoided, try and protect the scar by supporting it. The best way to do this is to apply some microporous or zinc oxide tape at right angles to the wound.

How to massage the wound

Using your thumb or fingertips, massage the scar firmly and against any underlying bone if possible. If the scar is on the lip or cheek it can be massaged between your finger and thumb.

Using a little aqueous cream on the scar will help to move your fingers smoothly over the wound and prevent any drying.

Massage for approximately 10-15 minutes, three to four times a day at first. Later on, you will probably not need to massage so often but it is best to continue twice daily for at least six months while the scar matures.

Questions

If you have any other questions that have not been answered by this leaflet, please ask a member of staff at the clinic.

Contact Telephone Numbers

If you have any problems, we normally advise you to contact your GP. However, we do understand that there are times when you may need to contact us.

Dressing Clinic, Level 11, Lister Hospital ☎ 01438 284767
(Monday to Friday, 7.30am - 5pm)

11B Minor Operations Department ☎ 01438 284527
(Monday to Friday, 7.30am - 5pm)