

# Postoperative Scar Care

## How to Look After Your Scar

### *If your scar is on your face:*

- Your sutures will be removed at 5-7 days.
- Keep the micropore tape on your scar for 10-14 days. The tape can be washed over and pat dry daily.
- After 10-14 days, remove the tape and apply silicone gel (Kelocote®, Strataderm® or Dermatrix® which can be bought over the counter from your local chemist) – smear along your scar twice a day. Wait for the gel to dry (5 minutes) before applying any makeup/sunscreen over it.
- Massage your scar at least 6 times a day during the day. (Massage with your thumb or finger in a rotatory motion along the scar for two minutes; concentrate on the more bulky and lumpy areas).
- Silicone gel should be used for at least 12 weeks and up to 6 months to achieve its maximal benefit.

### *If your scar is on your body:*

- Your sutures will be trimmed at 7-10 days; these sutures are under the skin and are dissolvable.
- The wounds are at their weakest at 2-4 weeks. This is when your healed wound has only 60% normal skin strength, and the sutures have started to dissolve, losing their strength to hold your wound together. This is the period when the wound is most vulnerable to dehiscence (breaking apart). It is important that no excessive force or tension is applied to the edges of the wound and that the white Fixomull/Hypafix tape is worn on the wound for a minimum of four weeks. The white tape should be left intact, washed over and pat dry daily. Sometimes, a hairdryer on a cool setting can be used to help it dry after a shower. The tape can be changed weekly.
- Regular massages should be applied to the scar over the tape. Massage with your thumb or finger in a rotatory motion along the scar for two minutes; concentrate on the more bulky and lumpy areas. Massage is recommended at least 6 times a day for the first 2 months then 4 times a day, for up to 4 months. If there is any persistent lumpiness in your scar, massaging is effective up to 6 months.
- After 4 weeks, remove the Fixomull/Hypafix tape. Silicone tape can then be used for a further 3 months to optimise the colour and lumpiness of the scar. Massaging can be continued over the silicone tape.

Sun Protection is essential for your scars. Cover up with clothing or hat, and use sunscreen containing the essential ingredients: titanium oxide or zinc oxide. Our nurses will be able to recommend a sunscreen for you if you are unsure.

## Scars Always Take Time to Mature

Scars need time to settle. A scar can take up to 12 months to 'mature'. Often its appearance during the first 3-6 months is not indicative of how it will look permanently. However, some scars can show aberrant growth patterns, and these need to be treated promptly to prevent worsening of the scar.

If your scar is not improving, or becoming increasingly thickened and lumpy after 8 weeks, or you are unhappy with your scar, please make an appointment to see your surgeon to check if further scar therapy is required, because conservative measures to modify your scar within the first 6 months can often change the long-term appearance of your scars.

### Information on Surgery & Scars:

All incisions from surgery result in scars. Every time the skin is cut in surgery, a scar is produced. The ideal end result of any plastic surgery procedure is a good quality scar which is well placed, difficult to see from a certain distance and/or able to be camouflaged.

Scars take time to settle. The lumpiness, puckering and thickening in scars take 2-3 months to diminish, whilst the redness and pigmentation can take up to 6-12 months to fade. Most scars become flat and pale after 12 months. The width (or stretch) of the scar is dependent on a variety of factors, including genetic trait of your scarring, area of the body, type of skin, amount of movement around the scar and the tension of wound closure. Scar on the face usually become fine white lines. Whereas on the body, they can vary from thin white lines, or widened pale scars, to raise pigmented (red/brown) thickened 'ropes'. 'Cross-hatching' of the scar (visible horizontal lines across the length of the scar like rungs on a ladder) can be minimised by removing sutures early and using deep stitches to diminish the tension on the surface of the scar. However, in some individuals, there are genetic propensities to form these marks, and thus these cross-hatching in the scars are unavoidable.

Numbness in and around the scar is to be expected with any surgical procedures. Nerves are divided locally with incisions, and this will result in numbness – often permanent. Partial nerve regeneration may occur for several months, giving tingling, pins-and-needles sensations to the scar. When this occurs, it is important to massage the scar or the skin over the area with these sensations. This is to 'desensitise' the nerve endings so that you do not develop 'hypersensitivity' within the scar. Scar numbness often becomes barely noticeable after 6 months due to either some nerve regeneration in the area or brain adaptation.

## Factors Affecting Scar Formation:

The quality and appearance of scars vary widely between individuals due to following factors:

- The individual's healing process (genetic traits, racial background)
- The individual's underlying medical conditions, medications, nutritional status and age
- The position of the scar on the body
- The type of skin involved (e.g. thin skin on the face vs thick skin on the back)
- The degree of tension placed on the scar
- Whether the scar is over mobile areas (e.g. over joints)

Many of these factors are beyond the control of the surgeon, and often cannot be predicted before surgery. As plastic surgeons, we try to hide scars in natural body/facial lines; we also employ particular suturing techniques to maximise the quality of the scar. Sometimes we design the scars so that it does not distort specific features (e.g. eye-brow position, shape of the jawline etc).

## The Quality of Your Scars

### ***The Colour:***

Surgical scars, when settled or mature, are almost always white (as they contain no pigment producing cells). However, occasionally, scars can become darker (also known as hyperpigmentation). This can happen in specific skin types (people with darker skin), or those on hormonal treatment (e.g. oral contraceptive pill) and certain medications. To help with decreasing pigmentation in the scar, silicone products such as gel or tape can expedite fading of hyperpigmentation. Sometimes, the use of laser treatment can also assist with any discolouration of the scar. To minimise colour change, it is also always important to protect the scar from sun exposure in its early stages.

### ***The Texture & Appearance:***

Scars will nearly always soften and flatten when it matures, but the time interval for this to occur is variable, from several months up to 2 years. Puckering, lumpiness and thickening of the scar can be due to scarring in the deeper layers of skin, underlying fat and/or muscle. As with skin scars, deep scarring will settle or mature with time, but the process may take longer. Both skin and deep scarring are especially responsive to regular massage (if performed within the first 6 months) and may also be assisted by other types of scar treatment such as topical silicone, ***but time is always necessary.***

## Follow-ups:

It is always important for you to have regular skin checks with your GP/dermatologist especially if you have a personal history or family history of skin cancers. Our nurses will remind you of your surgeon's recommendation.

If you have any concerns about your scar within the first 8 weeks, please call us with your questions and concerns. Our experienced nurses can often help with scar therapy advice, or offer reviews if required.

Please call for an appointment to have a scar review with your surgeon after 8 weeks if:

- Your scar is getting worse rather than better after 8 weeks
- Your scar starts to get itchy and/or grow after 9-12 months (this is a sign of keloid formation)
- Your scar keeps breaking open and bleed or scab after 3 months
- A nodule forms under your scar which may or may not have occasional thickened discharge.
- You are concerned about your scarring and would like to explore additional options for scar treatment.

Please note that your referrals are only valid for a limited period: this is calculated from the day of your initial consultation (3 months from a dermatologist, 12 months from a GP). Thus, if you require a scar review with your surgeon that is outside this period, you will need a new referral from your GP prior to your scar review appointment.