

Upper Limb Unit

Hand Therapy

Scar Management

Scar tissue forms as a normal part of the healing process following any injury to the skin or soft tissues. A scar will begin to form about three weeks after an injury or surgery and may continue changing for up to 18 months. The scar will never look like ordinary skin, but with proper care during the growth period, the result will be a soft, pale, supple and flat scar.

How scars form

The new skin behaves in a different way to normal skin. In normal skin there are lots of tiny thread-like structures called collagen fibres. These lie in flat orderly rows and give the skin elasticity and a 'bouncy' feel.

In scar tissue rather than sitting in neat lines the fibres form knots and become lumped together. These knotted collagen fibres can make the scar appear raised and uneven. Your scar may also be red. This redness is caused when tiny blood vessels become trapped under the surface of the scar.

Scar tissue is also less flexible than normal skin. If it is over a joint it may limit movement of the joint. Scar tissue may also stick to important structures beneath the skin such as tendons. This will also limit movement.

Occasionally more specific problems can develop with a scar. The scar may become hypertrophic or keloid.



Hypertrophic scars

Scars become hypertrophic when excessive amounts of scar tissue are formed within the original borders of the wound. These scars are usually very red and raised, and may also be painful or itchy. They occur more frequently after burns and in young or darker skinned people.

Keloid scars

Keloid scars are an overgrowth of scar tissue and develop beyond the original area of the wound. These scars are thick, rounded and bulky. Keloid scars may also be particularly red, painful and itchy. Cauliflower ears are one example of a keloid scar.

How do I care for my scar?

You can help reduce the amount of scarring by carrying out a few easy steps. None of these treatments will work in isolation but should produce a good result when combined.

Scar massage

Scars often become dry and itchy. It is important to moisturise regularly using a thick non-perfumed cream e.g. E45, Nivea, QV cream. This will help soften the scar and keep it supple. Massage will also help to reduce adhesions between the scar and other structures.

- Apply firm pressure to the scar. You should see your skin go white and move as you massage. Use small circular movements going across the scar along its full length.
- Try to stretch the scar along its length as you work in the cream.
- Massage for approximately five minutes until the cream is absorbed.
- Carry out this process at least three times a day.

Silicone gel

Silicone gel helps to keep the scar moist and improve its appearance. It is not understood exactly how silicone works. It is thought however that pressure, warmth and moisture reduce blood flow to the skin meaning that less scar tissue is formed.

Patient Information

- Apply the gel to clean dry skin and hold securely in place with a bandage or splint.
- Apply for a short period initially then check for any sign of irritation.
- If no reaction occurs, the gel can be worn overnight.
- Re-use the gel multiple times and replace only when it begins to dry out and crumble.
- The gel can be washed in warm soapy water, rinsed thoroughly and dried.
- When not in use return the gel to the foam layers and store in an airtight bag in cool conditions.

Elastomer

Elastomer is another silicone based product. It consists of a putty and catalyst moulded together to form a mouldable material. Elastomer is individually made and moulded to your scar. It should be used in the same way as silicone gel.

Splints

Splints are worn to stretch scar tissue and prevent tightness over a joint. They are usually worn when you are asleep to give the scar tissue a slow prolonged stretch. Splints are individually made from a lightweight material which is softened in water so that it can mould.

Compression/Pressure garments

We may use a compression bandage to apply pressure to your scar to encourage it to flatten out. This treatment is often combined with the silicone gel or Elastomer to achieve a soft flat scar. Sometimes a pressure garment may also be provided as part of your therapy to encourage the scar tissue to form in a less bulky way. If this is appropriate, your therapist will discuss this further with you.

Patient Information

Please speak to your therapist regarding any information in this leaflet or contact us:

Contact details:

Telephone: 024 7696 6013 for physiotherapy at **University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire**

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Document History

Department:	Occupational Therapy
Contact:	26016
Updated:	February 2020
Review:	February 2023
Version:	5.2
Reference:	HIC/LFT/930/09