

Scars

Any surgery or any injury involving the deeper layers of the skin will heal by forming a scar, which is permanent. A scar is a natural part of the healing process. Initially scars can be red and raised, however usually within 12 months most become flat and pale and leave a slight trace of the original injury that caused them. Scars form differently based on the location of the injury on the body and the age of person. Scar tissue forms because the body is unable to re-build the damaged tissue exactly. It has a different texture and is usually of inferior functional quality.

Problem Scars

In some cases the body can overproduce the collagen used to form the scar, which then causes it to grow above the level of the surrounding skin.

- **Hypertrophic Scars:** appear as raised red lumps but do not extend outside of the original margins of the injury and the appearance will often improve after a few years.
- **Keloid Scars:** are more serious because they can continue growing outside the original margins of the injury and may often require further treatment. Keloid scars can form more commonly in children, females, certain ethnic groups and specific sites on the body, most commonly 'flexor' surfaces, particularly the chest.
- **Pitted Scars:** appear as a sunken recess where muscle tissue or fat is lost from under the scar, the appearance of these types of scars can also improve over several years.
- **Stretched Scars:** most commonly seen as stretch marks during pregnancy where the skin is stretched but can also form due to surgery or injury. These will also improve over time.

Scar Treatments

Scars are noticeable for a number of reasons:

- * The position of the scar on the body
- * Whether it is distorting any surrounding structures
- * The contour
- * The colour & size

No scar can ever be completely removed. You will always be able to see where the injury occurred, however the appearance of scars can be improved by a number of means.

Compression:

Providing pressure to a healing wound with tape or compression garments can produce significant flattening of raised scars. Microtape can be purchased from a chemist and is flesh coloured, so it can be worn unobtrusively on the face to provide pressure to healing wounds. We recommend removing the tape prior to showering and replacing it after the wound has been dried thoroughly. For maximum benefit ideally it should be worn 24 hours each day for several weeks. Tape can be used immediately after sutures are removed.

Massage:

Once your sutures have been removed and the injury has completely healed, usually about 3-4 weeks after surgery, you can begin massaging the scar. Using firm pressure that should be uncomfortable but not painful, use a circular motion over the entire length of the scar for approximately 20 seconds, paying particular attention to any raised areas within the scar. This process should ideally be repeated 5 times daily for up to 4 weeks. A moisturiser can be used whilst massaging.

Scar Dressings:

Our clinic can provide patients with information on silicon based scar dressings which are available in most pharmacies in sheet and gel forms. Silicon dressings may improve the appearance of scars by softening, flattening and reducing redness.

UV Protection:

Scars do not contain the normal pigments that protect the skin from UV rays and therefore burn more easily, particularly in young children. For the first three months a suitable high UV protection sunscreen such as clear zinc, should be applied over the scar.

There are many factors that influence the development of a scar but most will heal very well in the first three months and will not need further treatment. However, it can take up to a year or more to improve a scar.