

## Scar Formation, Aftercare Following Surgery and Abnormal Scars

Scars are produced as part of the body's normal healing process. No matter how careful or meticulous the repair after an accident or operation, there will always be a permanent and visible mark.

The quality of the scar varies from one individual to another and from one part of the body to another, so it is impossible to be sure how a scar will eventually look. At first, the scar may be very stretched or irregular, but should become smoother with the passage of time. The scar may also become redder, harder and more raised, but will hopefully settle over a period of twelve to eighteen months when it becomes more supple, flat and pale.

### **Making the best scar possible**

Scars can be helped by massage. Massage reduces the tendency for the skin to adhere to any underlying structures and is thought to speed up the reduction of redness and irregularity. Children's scars generally remain harder and redder for longer, so massage is even more important for them. Massage may also relieve itching and the use of a bland moisturising cream will reduce friction between the scar and the finger, this can also improve the texture of the scar as it may lack the normal lubricating secretions. Creams such as E45, Nivea and Aqueous are suitable (they all do the same thing so choose one you like). Massage should involve moving the scar on the underlying structures rather than rubbing the scar itself, the nurse can show you the correct technique if you wish, and should be repeated for two minutes, twice a day. It is not advisable to start massage as soon as the stitches are removed because the scar will not be strong enough, so we recommend starting 2-3 weeks after surgery.

### **Scars and sunlight**

Scars are more prone to tanning from sunlight. It is advisable, therefore to avoid exposing a scar to strong sunlight for the first twelve months following surgery, or if you do so, use a strong sun-blocking cream. In practice, we recommend care for the first summer after surgery. A wide-brimmed hat will assist in protecting scars on the face and is a good precautionary measure. If scars are allowed to tan, it is possible that they will fade to leave a patchy mottled appearance. Scars often itch if individuals become too hot, so staying out of direct sunlight may increase comfort.

### **Abnormal Scars**

Unfortunately, some patients develop abnormal scars. These may be wide, thin and stretched; red thick and itchy (hypertrophic); or rarely thick but continuing to grow (keloid). Hypertrophic scars do flatten with time but become wide. They usually respond to the application of silicone gel or steroid tape as well as to injections of steroid. Keloid scars are the hardest to treat and there is still no completely satisfactory cure.