

Managing Your Scar

One of the most important goals of Moffitt Cancer Center is to provide you with the highest quality care through education, research and service. The following information has been developed by Dr Richard Klein to help you manage your scar/s.

What is a scar?

Scars result when the body repairs skin wounds caused by surgery, accident or disease. They are the natural result of the healing process. The longer it takes a wound to heal and the more damaged the skin, the greater the chance of a noticeable scar.

The location on the body or face as well as the patient's age and skin type will affect the way a scar forms. Older skin tends to scar less visibly whereas younger skin tends to over-heal resulting in larger and thicker scars.

Why are scars visible?

Mature scars become visible if they are raised, indented, or if they exhibit a different color or texture compared to the surrounding skin. Additionally, scars that cross wrinkles or natural expression lines will appear more visible because they neither follow a natural pattern nor look like a naturally occurring line.

Why do scars form?

All skin wounds will result in a scar. When a skin wound occurs from surgery, accident or disease, the body will respond with normal wound healing. Wound healing is characterized by three sequential and overlapping phases.

- **Inflammation:** In the first phase the body tries to heal the skin wound by a process of inflammation. During this time the scar will be swollen, tender and red. This phase can last up to two weeks.
- **Proliferation:** In the second phase the body starts the skin repair process by depositing scar tissue within the wound. In this phase, which may last up to six weeks, the scar will become raised and hard as large amounts of collagen are being laid down within the scar. During the proliferation phase a scar is considered immature and is characterized by the three R's: **red, raised and rigid**.
- **Remodeling:** In this third phase the body works on the scar to soften and flatten it. During this period the scar will become more mature as some of the collagen disappears. This phase can last from twelve to eighteen months.

How can I lessen my scar?

Scar formation and scar maturation are ongoing processes. Scars continue to grow and change throughout the recovery process which may take from twelve to eighteen months. Scar massage is an effective way to decrease scar tissue build up and help make scars less noticeable. Massage will not help soften a scar more than two years old.

What is scar massage?

Scar massage is one method of softening and flattening scars. It serves several important functions:

- Promoting collagen remodeling by applying pressure to scars
- Helping to decrease itching
- Providing moisture and flexibility to the scar

When should I start massaging my scars?

You should start massaging your scars two weeks after surgery. Wait until the sutures have been removed and all scabs have fallen off by themselves. Do not pull your scabs off.

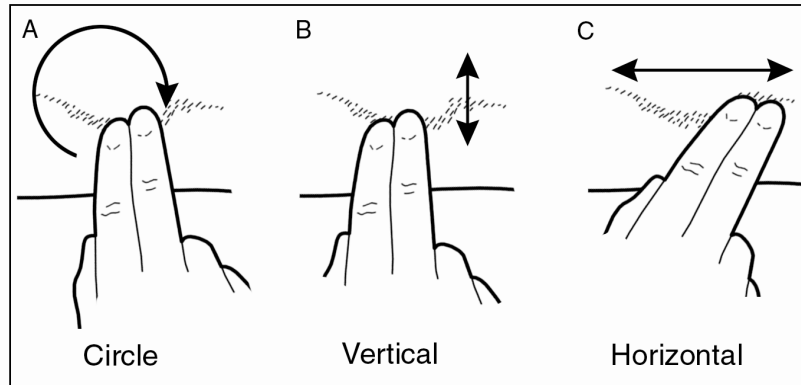
How do I massage my scars?

Use the pads or soft tips of your fingers to massage the scar and tissue around the scar. Massage in all three directions.

Circles: Using two fingers make small circles over the length of the scar and the skin surrounding it.

Vertical: Using two fingers massage the scar up-and-down.

Horizontal: Using two fingers massage the scar from side-to-side.



How much pressure should I apply?

You should apply as much pressure as you can tolerate. Begin with light pressure and progress to deeper and firmer pressure. Massage lotion in, applying enough pressure to make the scar area lighten in color or turn white.

How often should I massage my scar?

Massage should be done two to three times daily for ten minutes each time.

How long is massaging necessary?

You should massage your scars as instructed for at least six months following your surgery or injury. Massaging for more than six months will not hurt your scars and may actually prove beneficial.

When should I stop massaging?

Stop massaging and contact your doctor if you experience any of the following:

- Redness
- Bleeding
- Scar feels warmer than the skin around it
- More pain than usual at the site of the scar

What else should I know about scars?

While your scars are healing, you should avoid sun exposure. Sun exposure may cause your scars to hyper pigment, or turn darker than the surrounding skin. You should use sun block with an SPF of 35 or greater and wear protective clothing at all times. Keep your scars away from the sun for at least one year following your surgery.

What lotion should I use?

- Use any moisturizing lotion that will keep your skin soft and supple.
- Do not use heavily perfumed lotions.
- Do not use any lotion containing vitamin E for the first month following your surgery or injury. You may use vitamin E containing lotions after the first month.

The following is a list of some examples:

Silicone Strips– worn 12 hours every day for 6 months

Silicone Gel– Scar Gel-Scar Fade

Arbonne®

Eucerin®

Nivea®

Aveeno®

Mederma®

Copper Scar Cream®

Notes:

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