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If you are unsure about anything, wait to speak to your
physiotherapist or contact the ward you were on.

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A guide to...

Scar Management

Patient Information

Watford General Hospital
Hemel Hempstead Hospital
St Albans City Hospital

After an injury and/or surgery, it is normal for a scar to develop. Scars are formed from fibrous tissue and they are a natural part of the body's healing process. Most of them will fade and become paler over time however they may not completely disappear. The process of scar healing can take up to two years.

Most wounds will be dressed before you leave hospital. If advised that you can remove the dressing, most wounds/ stitches can be gently cleaned using water once you are discharged home. Your wound care may then be continued in outpatients where your wound will be assessed and further information given to you.

You can carry out treatments to help improve the scar's appearance and prevent the formation of further scar tissue that sticks to underlying structures. This will help prevent restrictions in joint range of movement, puckering of the scar, and keep the skin's ability to move freely. If the scar is too painful or sensitive to touch, you can massage away from the area and then work towards the sensitive area. It may take months to achieve a flat, non-sensitive scar site.

What do I need?

- Non-perfumed/fragranced cream (e.g. E45, Nivea) or bio-oil.

What do I need to do?

- Once the wound has healed, with no openings, you can begin by applying a small amount of the cream/oil to the area around the scar and begin by gently massaging around the edge. This begins to desensitise the area so that it is less tingly/painful.
- Then, if comfortable, move onto the site of the scar. Using two fingers/ a thumb, massage up and down the scar and at a right angle to the scar. Start with a gentle pressure and slowly increase if tolerated.

- If these movements are comfortable, a more vigorous massage (deeper and firmer) can be applied in small circles with two fingers or your thumb around the scar (not along the scar). This helps prevent the scar tissue sticking to the underlying structures. This can be done in a clockwise and anticlockwise motion.

How often should I do this?

- Gently massage the scar for 2-3 minutes, 2-3 times a day.
- Massage the area around the scar site more vigorously for 2-5 minutes, 2-3 times a day.
- The massage should be pain free. If you experience pain then reduce the pressure and focus on the area around the scar to begin with.

Frequently Asked Questions

What should I do if my scar site to be a combination of red, warm, oozing (pus), open and extremely painful?

Contact your GP urgently or attend a local walk-in or urgent care centre if you believe your scar site presents like any of the symptoms above. The wound may be infected and need a course of antibiotics.

Should I massage my scar if it is open?

Wait for the scar to close completely before applying non-perfumed/fragranced cream or oil to the scar site to avoid infection.

Should I massage my scar if the dressing is still on?

No, wait for the doctors to advise removal of your dressing before massaging the scar.

What do I do if I can't tolerate keeping massaging my scar because it is too sensitive?

Begin first with the areas around the scar, to begin the desensitisation process. Slowly gently massage the scar site for 10 seconds and gradually build up the length of time you are able to massage it for.