Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Caring for Your Scars After Skin Surgery

This information will help you care for your scar after skin surgery.

How your skin heals after surgery

Scars are a part of your body's healing process. They form after surgery or when you have a cut or other wound on your skin.

After your surgery or procedure, your wound may be very red, swollen, or feel numb. In the first weeks after surgery, please follow the instructions from your healthcare provider on how to care for your surgery site. After several weeks, the scar that forms may feel hard, tight, raised, or bumpy. Over time, the scar will become softer, smoother, and less red. Your scar will continue to heal for 12 to 18 months after your surgery.

Caring for your scar at home

Scars do not go away completely, but you can do things to help your scar look and feel better. Talk with your dermatology surgeon (skin doctor) before doing any of the things below. Most people can start doing them about 4 weeks after surgery.

Protect your scar from the sun

Exposing your scar to sunlight can make it heal more slowly. It can also make the scar darker and more noticeable.

It's important to protect your scar when you're outside or any time it may be exposed to the sun. You can do the following things:

- Apply sunscreen to your scar. Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen that's SPF 30 or higher.
- Wear a hat with a wide brim to block the sun.
- Wear clothing that's designed to block the sun.

For more information about using sunscreen, read the resource *Understanding Sunscreen* (www.mskcc.org/pe/sunscreen). You can find it online, or you can ask your nurse.

Massage your scar

Massaging your scar can help make it less hard. To do this, use your fingers to gently massage your scar for 1 to 2 minutes. You can do this 1 to 3 times per day.

Use silicone products

Silicone products, such as silicone sheets and gels, can keep your scar moisturized and help it heal. You can use them under your makeup and clothing.

Silicone sheets

Silicone sheets may help make your scar softer and more flat.

To use a silicone sheet, cut it to the size of your scar and apply it to the scar. You can leave it on for several hours or overnight. You can wash the sheet daily and reuse it. Some brands of silicone sheets include Cica-Care®, Rejuveness®, Scar Fx®, and ScarGuard®.

Silicone gels

To use a silicone gel, apply it to your scar and let it dry. You can do this daily. Some brands of silicone gels include Biocorneum®, Kelo-cote®, Mederma®, and ScarGuard.

Use makeup

You can use special makeup called camouflage makeup to cover your scar. Camouflage makeup helps your scar

match your natural skin color. Some brands of camouflage makeup include Dermablend® and SmartCover®.

You can also try putting green-tinted makeup over a red scar to help it blend in with your skin color.

Medical treatments for scars

There are also medical treatments that may help your scar look and feel better. Examples of these treatments include:

- Steroid injections (shots) or topical steroid creams
- Dermabrasion (surgical scraping of your top skin layers)
- Laser treatments
- Cryotherapy (a procedure that uses extreme cold (liquid nitrogen) to freeze and destroy tissue)

These treatments can be done after enough time has passed for your scar to heal on its own. Your dermatologist will tell you if one of these treatments may be right for you.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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