

Further information

If you require any further information after reading this leaflet, please contact:

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As a key provider of healthcare and as an employer, the Trust has a statutory obligation to promote and respect equality and human rights. This is set out in various pieces of legislation including: Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, Disability Discrimination Act (2005), Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Age Discrimination Act (2006)

Our information for patients can also be made available in other languages, Braille, audio tape, disc or in large print

We offer a Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS). This is a confidential service for patients and their families to help with any questions or concerns about local health services.

You can contact the service by the direct telephone line on 01926 600054 or using the phone links which are available in both hospitals or calling in at the office located in the main entrance at Warwick hospital.

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South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Hand and Upper Limb Service

Scar Management

Patient Information

What causes scars?

Scars occur when the normal surface of the skin is altered by surgery or trauma. Scars are formed as part of the natural healing process and can take up to 2 years to fully mature.

Normal skin contains lots of tiny, thread like structures called collagen fibres. These fibres lie in orderly, neat rows and are what makes the skin elastic and bouncy.

When scars heal, the new collagen fibres form unevenly and become clumped together, rather than sitting in straight lines. This process is what can make a scar appear raised and uneven. In normal scarring, the new tissue is not over-produced and there is no undue redness. The scar and surrounding skin will be soft, pale and supple.

In some cases the scar tissue carries on growing to form lumpy, hard areas, which can also be raised and red.

There are two common types of abnormal scar tissue:

- Hypertrophic scars are raised, red, itchy, immobile scars, which can form as a result of prolonged healing, but remain within the original scar outline. These scars usually improve within six months.
- Keloid scars are itchy, red, very raised, sensitive, and grow outside the original scar outline. These scars can continue to develop for up to a year.

Factors that can affect healing include:

- Wound depth: deep wounds involve more layers of skin, which can result in more scar tissue developing.
- Wound healing time: if healing takes a long time there is a higher risk of more scar tissue developing.
- Skin colour: very fair skin and dark skin can have an increased risk of scarring.
- Pregnancy: scars can worsen post-pregnancy due to high levels of oestrogen.
- Smoking: smoking decreases the formation of collagen due to reduced oxygen levels in the blood supply to the skin.
- Diabetes: delayed healing due to increased risk of poor blood supply to the wound.
- Infection: disrupts and prolongs the healing process.

How do we treat scars?

You may be given one or a combination of the following treatments to treat your scar.

Massage

- Use any unscented skin cream to lubricate the skin
- Apply firm pressure to the scar, you should see the skin blanch (become pale)
- Use small circular movements
- Try to stretch the skin as you massage
- You should massage at least 4-6 times a day

Silicon sheet or gel

- Silicon is widely used for scar management as it softens and flattens scars, promotes healing and decreases redness.
- Provided in either a sheet form, which is placed over the scar, or a gel, which is massaged into the skin.
- In sheet form the silicon can be worn at night or for up to 24hr periods. Directions for use will be given by your therapist.

Splints

- You may be provided with a splint to prevent tightness in a particular area of the hand. Directions for use will be given by your therapist

Pressure garments

- A glove, compression tape or elasticated tube can be used to flatten scar and reduce swelling, which can affect scarring. Directions for use will be given by your therapist