



# Scar massage following skin surgery

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**This leaflet outlines the benefits of scar massage following skin surgery, and explains how to do it.**

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## What is a scar?

Scars are fibrous tissues that forms on the skin after a wound, injury to the surface of the skin or as a result of surgery. Your body makes fibres out of collagen to strengthen the scar. The longer a wound takes to heal or the more damaged the skin, the thicker and less flexible the scar will be. The appearance, thickness and rigidity of the scar depends on several factors, including: skin type, location on the body, extent of damage and complications during wound healing.

Scar tissue is never as good as the skin or tissue it replaces. Your age and skin type can also affect how a scar forms and behaves.

Soon after surgery, scars may look flat and whitish in colour, but they can change and become hard, raised and thick. As they heal, they may stick to underlying tissues or structures which can affect normal function, as well as giving a puckered / pulled in effect to the scar. They may also itch or become sensitive to the touch.

## Why massage scars?

Scar massage is a way of softening and flattening scars. It can stop scar tissue build up and make scars less noticeable, increase their mobility and make them less sensitive.

Your scar will continue to mature for about 12-24 months, so the earlier and more regularly you massage your scar, the less the chance of long term problems.

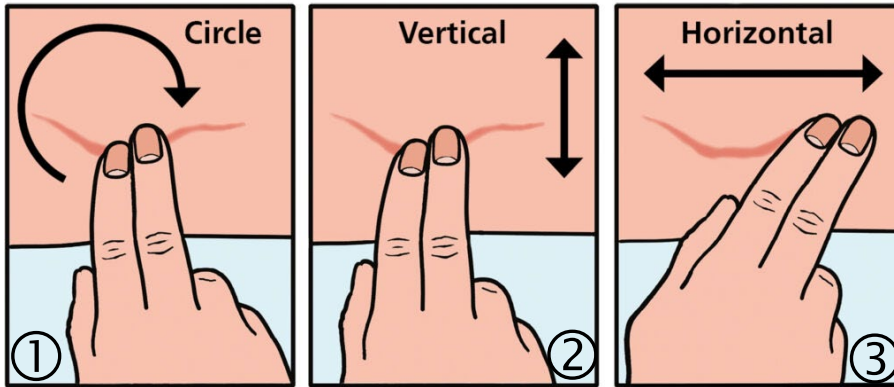
## When should I start scar massage after surgery?

It is important that you only start massaging your scar once it is healed enough. You can start moisturising the scar when there is no oozing from the wound (usually around 2 weeks) and gentle scar massage can start soon after. **You should not massage your scar if you still have stitches or if the scar has a scab on it.**

## How to massage your scar(s)

- Apply a non-scented moisturiser or oil to your scar. There is no evidence to support the use of one product over another – the aim is for lubrication and to prevent dragging the scar under your fingers.
- Aim to massage the scar and any tight or hard areas close to the scar for 2-3 minutes between 2-3 times daily. After a few days, increase to massaging for 5-10 minutes, 2-3 times daily.
- The massage needs to be deep and firm to the point that the skin blanches (goes white). However, it should not be overly painful.

- With the tips of two or more fingers, gently apply pressure to the scar and surrounding area while slowly and firmly moving your fingers in one of three directions:
  1. In small circles while moving along the length of the scar. The circumference of the circles should encompass the skin on either side of the scar.
  2. Back and forth along the length of the scar (vertical).
  3. From one side of the scar to the other (horizontal), slowly moving along the length so the whole of the scar and its surrounding tissue has been massaged.



*Image source: The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust*

**It may take several months to achieve a flat, mobile and non-sensitive scar and every patient heals differently.**

### **When should I stop massaging?**

Stop massaging and contact your GP 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

### **Useful contact details**

Skin Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialists 01183227271 [skincancernurses@royalberkshire.nhs.uk](mailto:skincancernurses@royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

Plastics Dressing Clinic [rbb-tr.CAT1@nhs.net](mailto:rbb-tr.CAT1@nhs.net)

Dermatology Nursing Team [CAT8.Dermatology@royalberkshire.nhs.uk](mailto:CAT8.Dermatology@royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

Patient Advice and Liaison Service 0118 322 8338 [PALS@royalberkshire.nhs.uk](mailto:PALS@royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

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**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

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