

Scar management

Physiotherapy information for patients, relatives and carers

This information sheet aims to provide you with general information about managing your scar(s) to help you get the best possible results after your surgery. If you have any other questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to the team caring for you.

What are scars?

A scar forms as the body responds to an injury or incision to the skin and soft tissues. It is made up of a rich vascular supply, variety of cells and collagen or fibrous tissue.

- The type of scar that develops is dependent on family history, age, ethnicity and site of the surgery or injury, as well as the compliance in scar management as advised by the therapist. Previous scars may provide an indication for how subsequent scarring may present.
- The scar goes through phases of changes; from the active changeable stage to the maturation stage, where further improvement is unlikely. The total period of maturation is about two years.
- It is essential that management of the scar starts as early as possible to minimise the effects and maximise the chances of improvement.

What are the most common issues we see in scars?

1. **Sensation changes** - you might experience numbness or decreased feeling, or even hypersensitivity in your scar.
2. **Pain** - your scar and its surrounding areas might be tender or even painful to touch
3. **Altered texture** - your scar might be raised or feel different to touch compared to the other areas of your skin.
4. **Colour changes** - your scar might appear a different colour compared to other areas of your skin.
5. **Scar sticking to other tissues – ‘adhesions’** - your scar and its surrounding areas might feel “stuck” to deeper structures and is more difficult to move compared to the uninjured parts of your skin.

Scar massage

Regular scar massage with appropriate pressure helps to reorganise collagen fibres, transforming the dense, disorganised tissue of a new scar into a smoother, softer and

more flexible form. This process, known as collagen remodelling, improves blood circulation to the area and can prevent or break down adhesions that may cause the scar to stick to underlying tissues. It can help to reduce itching and hypersensitivity of the scar, reduce redness and swelling and speed up the flattening.

When to start massage?

Once your skin is completely closed, the stitches are out and any scabs have fallen off the healing scar. Your therapist will help to determine when your scar is ready to start massage

How often to massage your scar?

Massage should be done at least 4 times daily for 5 to 10 minutes (depending on size of scar) each time.

Technique

Your therapist will teach you how to massage the scar.

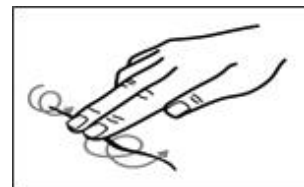
Massage the scar and the area around it using the pads of your second and third fingers or your thumb, depending on the scar's location

You should apply as much pressure as you can tolerate, start with lighter pressure and gradually increase the pressure to a deeper, firmer massage. It is normal to feel some pulling or slight burning sensation, but it should not be a sharp, intense pain. Apply enough pressure to make the scar area lighten in colour or turn white.

You may use a white, unscented moisturiser (e.g. Dermatrix or E45).

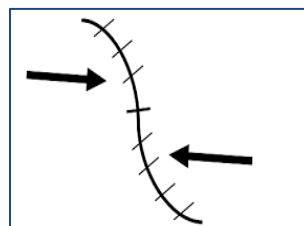
Circles

With your thumb or fingers massage using a slow circular motion so that the skin moves on the underlying tissue. Repeat along the entire scar in both clockwise and anticlockwise directions.



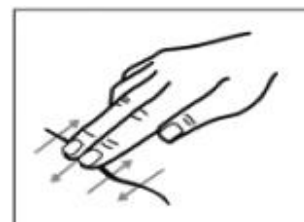
'S' - bend or zig-zag

With your thumb or fingers put pressure on opposite sides of the scar. To create an 's-bend' repeat along the entire scar.



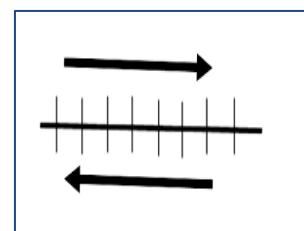
Transverse friction

With your thumb or fingers massage up and down along the scar so that the skin moves on the underlying tissue. Repeat along the entire scar.



Longitudinal friction

With your thumb or fingers massage along the scar line in both directions so the skin moves on the underlying tissue. Repeat along the entire scar.



A scar can take up to two years to fully mature. Scar massage should continue until the scar is fully mature.

You should immediately stop and consult a doctor if you experience the following:

- A change in colour such as redness or darkening, and warmth, around the scar
- Bleeding from the scar
- More pain than usual in or around the scar
- Blisters or rash on or around the scar
- The scar reopens.

Other advice for managing your scar

1. **Provide extra protection to the scar from sun** until the scar has fully matured (the mature scar is typically the same colour as the rest of your skin or slightly lighter)

- Cover it up
- Use sunscreen (SPF of 30 or greater)
- Avoid peak sun hours (10am - 4pm).

Even after a scar has matured it is still good practice to use sunscreen to protect it, as scars will always remain more sensitive to sun damage than uninjured skin.

2. **Compression** for example using compression garments, may help to prevent excessive scar formation and to flatten the scar. Please speak to a member of your medical team for further information on the use of compression.

3. **Silicone** is a gel like material in the form of a patch or spray used to soften scars that are raised and sensitive. It might help to reduce pain, elevation and itchiness of scars and help to keep the scar hydrated.

Caution:

- Silicone gel cannot be applied to open wounds, blisters or broken down scars.
- Some patients also develop an allergic reaction towards silicone.
- Please speak to a member of your medical team for further information on the use of silicone.

4. **Exercises** given by your physiotherapist will assist in encouraging gliding of the underlying structures that might adhere/stick down due to the scar tissues.

Contacts

We hope this information has been helpful. Should you have any further questions, please contact the Physiotherapy Team where you had your operation.

Inpatient Orthopaedics (Denmark Hill) Tel: **020 3299 2368**

Inpatient Orthopaedics (PRUH) Tel: **01689 864632**

MyChart

Our MyChart app and website lets you securely access parts of your health record with us, giving you more control over your care. To sign up or for help, call us on 020 3299 4618 or email **kings.mychart@nhs.net**. Visit **www.kch.nhs.uk/mychart** to find out more.

Sharing your information

King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has partnered with Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust through the King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas' hospitals. King's College Hospital and Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trusts share an electronic patient record system, which means information about your health record can be accessed safely and securely by health and care staff at both Trusts. For more information visit **www.kch.nhs.uk**.

Care provided by students

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

Tel: **020 3299 4618**

Email: **kings.pals@nhs.net**

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Interpreting and Accessible Communication Support on 020 3299 4618 or email **kings.access@nhs.net**

www.kch.nhs.uk