NHS
Royal Devon
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Scar management following your breast surgery

(Eastern services)

Other formats

If you need this leaflet in another format such as Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service:

- 01392 402093 (for Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter services)
- 01271 314090 (for North Devon services)
- rduh.pals@nhs.net

After your surgery, you will have a scar at the site of your operation. Your nurse will advise you about when you can take the dressings off after your surgery, but sometimes this is done during one of your hospital visits. This is usually around two weeks after your operation.

What are the benefits of looking after my scar?

Performing scar massage has physical and psychological benefits. Some of the physical benefits include softening the tissue, increasing your range of movement in the affected area, reducing pain/itching/sensitivity and stimulating the tissue to improve circulation to that area. The psychological benefits include relaxation due to the gentle touch, acceptance of the new scar and helping you to become even more involved in your recovery.

Scarring can block or limit the flow of the lymphatic fluid (normal body fluid) and increase inflammation. It is therefore advisable to look after your scar, to reduce the risk of the scar becoming tight and uncomfortable. However, it is important to let the scar heal fully before rubbing or massaging the scar, and we recommend waiting until at least six weeks after your operation.

How long will my scar take to heal?

A scar can take twelve to eighteen months until it is fully mature. During that time, the appearance can change. It can often appear red and raised and feel quite itchy at the start. The colour will change over time. It may even become darker before it gets lighter and becomes pale. Discomfort and/or numbness is normal in immature scars. A scar can often feel a bit lumpy or hard under the skin. The massage will help to breakdown the scar tissue, and it will hopefully become flat.

What can I use to rub into my scar?

We do not recommend performing massage with any moisturiser or emollient. The idea is that you can perform it ‘dry’, only applying a non-perfumed moisturiser once you have finished the massage. The benefits of scar management are more about how you complete the scar massage, rather than what you are rubbing into the scar.

How do I look after my scar?

First phase of caring for your scar (Tape):

Once the dressing has been removed, it is likely that we will provide you with some tape to place over the scar. The tape can be used for a further four weeks, at which point you can start to massage the scar. If the scar has been slow to heal, we will advise you to delay the massage.

Assuming your scar is healing well, we recommend you place a single layer of tape along the length of the scar. This can be left on for a week, and can be left in place while you shower. (Taking it off too early may irritate the skin and cause it to break down). Once you have showered, ensure the tape is completely dry (pat with a towel), before getting dressed. Some people may use a hair dryer on a cooler setting to dry the tape, but be mindful about any loss of sensation around your skin/scar as you may aggravate the area with the heat. Change the tape weekly for four weeks in total. If it becomes loose, simply replace the single layer.

Second stage of caring for your scar (Massage):

1. Begin with very gentle touch to the scar (equivalent to the pressure you would apply to your eyelid). Use your index and middle finger, moving them in all directions (circular motions, up and down, side to side) along the length of the scar. This will result in moving the skin around in different directions. For bigger scars, you will benefit from massaging above and below the scar to release some of the scar tissue. Avoid pulling the scar apart and putting any tension along the scar.

2. We recommend performing ‘dry’ massage, as this will prevent your fingers from just sliding along the scar. It is recommended to perform the massage three to four times every day for two-three minutes each time. After each session, you will benefit from applying a non-perfumed moisturiser to rehydrate the skin.

3. Due to the length of time a scar will take to heal, you may need to continue this treatment for eighteen months. If the scar is healing well, and you have a good range of movement, with no concerns about the scar, you may wish to stop the massage a lot sooner.

What do I do if I am concerned about my scar or have a history of poor scar healing?

For some patients, the scar may not heal as we would hope. Always speak with your breast care nurse if you have any concerns about this.

If after three months, you have concerns about a raised (hypertrophic) scar, you may benefit from some additional input. It is sometimes recommended to prescribe silicone sheet dressings to the scar, or even compression therapy, but this is not common. If you do notice a raised scar, avoid deep massage to the scar, or pulling and stretching of the scar as this may make things worse.

Some patients may have a history of ‘keloid’ scarring. This is when scars are raised and have extended beyond the incision itself. With a keloid scar, the scar continues to become redder and become more raised, showing no signs of improvement. These scars can often feel painful and itchy. Keloid scarring is more common in African or Asian skin types, and sometimes has a genetic factor. It is likely we will recommend a prescription of silicone sheets and compression therapy, and ask that you contact us sooner rather than later if you do notice this. Again, we would avoid deep massage or stretching the scar as this may make the symptoms worse.

If you have any questions or concerns, the Breast Clinical Nurse Specialists can be contacted on:
01392 402707

Your notes

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern, please contact PALS:

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You can also share your feedback on the Care Opinion website at www.careopinion.org.uk or freephone 0800 122 3135.

Scan the QR code to visit the Care Opinion website →

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