

## Scar Care

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### General

- Every cut on skin will leave a scar.
- Scars take one full year to “mature” or settle.
- The quality of a scar depends on a number of factors including genetics, location, and the nature of the wound and the process of wound healing.

### After Care

To make typical scars look as good as possible, we recommend the three **S’s** (Scar massage, Sunscreen, and Silicone sheets). These techniques are also used as part of treatment for complex scar problems such as hypertrophic and keloid scars.

- Scar Massage
  - **Why?** – *As the wound heals, massage is thought to provide the tissues with stimulation that encouraging the scar to heal in a soft, supple, and non-painful way. Massage also helps the movement of excess fluid or “edema” from the tissues to help create a smoother surface.*
  - **When?** – *Once fully healed without any stitches, scabs, or open areas (2-3 weeks after sutures removed)*
  - **How?** – *Using a gentle moisturizer (plain petroleum jelly works well), deeply press onto the scar or area of surgery and make slow and gentle circles with 1 or 2 fingers. Avoid moisturizers with antibiotics or numerous fragrances unless otherwise directed, as they can lead to skin irritation and inflammation. Massage along the scar, across the scar, and in circles 3-5 minutes at a time, 2-3 times per day. If it is excessively painful, stop and try again in a week.*
  - **For how long?** – *The first 3 months are the most important, but you may continue up to a full year.*
- Sunscreen
  - **Why?** – *In the first year, scars are particularly sensitive to the sunlight which can cause permanent changes to the color of the scar.*
  - **When?** – *After sutures are removed.*

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- **How?** – We encourage everyone to make use of sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher) part of a daily skin routine. For fresh scars, use of an even higher SPF is encouraged. Reapplying every 2 hour is a must. You may have to re-apply more frequently if you sweat or have been in water. Follow instructions on the bottle. You can also use an opaque covering over the scar to really protect it from the light.
- **For how long?** – For the first year to help prevent color changes, but use of sunscreen should be made a life-long habit to protect against skin cancer and early signs of skin aging.
- Silicone sheets
  - **Why?** – It is not completely understood why silicone helps improve the appearance and feel of a scar, but scientific evidence suggests that it can help.
  - **When?** – After sutures are removed.
  - **How?** – A variety of generic silicone sheets are available at drug stores. Trim the sheet to a size that will completely cover the area of the scar. Cover the scar with the sheet and keep it covered for as many hours of the day as possible. You may remove the sheet to massage the scar or clean the wound (e.g. shower). These sheets tend to be self-adhesive and can be re-used as long as they remain sticky. Once the sheets are no longer sticky, they can be discarded and a new sheet used.
  - **For how long?** – The first 3 months are the most important, but may continue up to a full year.

### *Other Products*

While you will find a number of scar remedies on the shelves at your drug store, not all of them have scientific evidence to support them. The techniques we recommended above have at least some evidence to suggest that they may be helpful. These products and techniques are generally less expensive than brand-name scar treatments. You may find combination liquids that include a moisturizer, silicone, and sunscreen all in one. These products tend to be more expensive than the generic parts, but can be very convenient and easy to use.

If you have any further questions or have an issue not addressed in this hand-out, please call our office.

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