

Supporting  
you to care for  
wounds and to  
minimise scarring

Created with help from expert  
Dermatologist Justine Hextall

Supported by  
**Bio-Oil®**

# About you

**Note for your healthcare professional:** please complete this section for your patient to help support them to care for wound healing and minimise scarring.

## About you

1. What type of wound/scar(s) (Hypertrophic, Atrophic, Keloid, Contracture) do you have?
2. If applicable, how many stitches in wound? When should they be removed and should steri-strips be applied? .....
3. You should wait until your wound has healed and any stitches removed (if applicable) before taking steps to minimise scarring. This is likely to take at least ..... weeks.
4. How long is the scar likely to take to fully mature? .....
5. Any specific care instructions to be followed

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Dear Patient

You have been given this information booklet to help support you in looking after your scars.

Scars are very common, in fact on average each person in the UK has about 3 scars on their body<sup>1</sup>, yet despite this, often people don't receive much advice about how to care for them.

Scar care is an important step in the recovery process, whether you have had a minor surgical procedure or are recovering from a serious accident or illness. For many people, a scar doesn't just leave a physical impression on their skin, it also affects them emotionally and can have a real impact on their day-to-day life. Therefore, we think it is important that you are given some advice and support.

A survey of 1,000 people with scars in the UK<sup>2</sup>, highlighted that 26% feel that their scar has affected their general self-confidence, and 49% feel their scar affected their body confidence specifically. This indicates that feelings of low self-esteem and concerns about body image can be significant.

The information in this guide will help you to understand how scars mature and change in appearance, what to expect and what you can do to help support the skin's natural healing process.

Dr Justine Hextall, Consultant Dermatologist

<sup>1</sup> survey of 3,000 UK adults, March 2011, One Poll

<sup>2</sup> survey of 1,000 people with scars, 2016, Opinion Health



# Why is it important to care for your scars?

Scars can leave a lasting impression in more than one way. In an image-conscious society that places immense pressure on how we look, scars can cause some people to experience a loss of confidence and self-esteem. The extent of this will often vary depending on the location of your scar, how and why it occurred, as well as your age and sex.

For some, these concerns may have knock-on effects on other areas of their life.

Caring for your scar can help you to accept them and lessen the long-term impact. As well as caring for your scar physically, you might also find it helpful to talk to other people with scars or discuss how you are feeling with friends and family.



# What are the different types of scars?<sup>3</sup>

Scars come in many different shapes and sizes. Knowing the type of scar(s) you have can help you to understand how it might mature and look.

## Atrophic

Typically small and form indentations below the surface of the skin, for example surgical incision. Indented or depressed/sunken scars are also described as atrophic, for example like those from acne or chickenpox.



## Hypertrophic

Take the form of red lumps, raised above the surface of the skin. They can continue to thicken for months, can be itchy or painful, but remain within the boundaries of the original wound site.



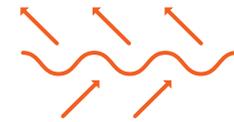
## Keloid

Raised scars that spread beyond the original area of skin damage may be minor or major. They continue to grow over time, and usually recur after excision. This type will need ongoing management with a healthcare professional.



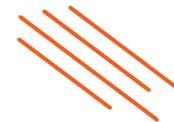
## Scar contractures

Develop when scars cross joints or skin creases at right angles, often as a result of burn injuries. They can cause tightening of the skin, and may cause discomfort or affect movement. If you are experiencing these symptoms, speak to your healthcare professional.



## Stretch marks (striae)

The result of the skin suddenly stretching. Deep layer of skin breaks in places, allowing it to show through the top layer. Often occurring in a period of rapid weight gain, pregnancy or during growth spurts in puberty.



# The stages of scar formation

Wound healing and the creation of a scar is made up of several overlapping phases.



# How can you minimise the appearance of your scars?

Scars usually fade in colour over time, and while there is no treatment that can make a scar disappear entirely, there are various solutions, including preventative measures, used alone or as part of combination therapy, which offer an opportunity to improve the scar's appearance.

## Practical tips for self-care

Following a wound or medical procedure, there is a window of opportunity to help ensure a scar heals well. Factors such as bleeding, infection and the wound

opening up, as well as smoking, can delay the healing process. There are a number of things you can do to help care for your scars.

### To minimise infection:

- ✓ Keep any dressings on unless advised to remove them.
- ✓ Keep the wound dressing dry (damp dressings leave the area susceptible to infection).
- ✓ Wrap cling film over the treatment site when showering.
- ✓ If the wound is exposed, salt water bathing daily is helpful, ensuring the area is gently dried afterwards.

# The CARE guide

## To minimise the chances of your wound opening:

- ✓ Take extra care before the stitches are removed.
- ✓ Avoid vigorous exercise.
- ✓ Avoid stretching the site.
- ✓ Apply micropore tape or steri-strips to the site to help strengthen the area.

## Once your wound has healed:

- ✓ For the first few weeks applying micropore tape or steri-strips will help protect the scar from stretching
- ✓ Massage an oil or moisturiser into the scar daily to keep the scar hydrated and soften the scar tissue.
- ✓ Wear a sun cream as sun exposure on new scars can cause pigmentation that can take time to settle.
- ✓ For certain scars, you could be advised to apply silicone gels or sheets to the scar.

## Remember:

It can take up to two years to see the scar at its best so you can be reassured that in most cases the scar will continue to improve.

If the scar isn't healing, particularly if it is red and itchy and becoming more pronounced, you should see your doctor. It may be that the scar is being overactive and topical treatments may be needed to reduce this activity to help healing.

## Medical intervention

In some cases, further medical intervention may be required for the treatment of a scar. You could discuss the following with your healthcare professional:

### Corticosteroid injections

### Surgery

### Laser or light therapy

### Pressure therapy

Aesthetic treatments, which wouldn't be available on the NHS include:

### Chemical peels

### Skin needling

### Dermal fillers

### Amongst others

The CARE guide offers helpful tips on how to self-care for your scar at home.



## CONNECT & CONTACT

Massaging your scar(s) twice a day can help to stimulate the repair process and help you connect with the scar emotionally.



## APPLICATION

Wait until your wound has fully healed and allow 4 weeks after any stitches have been removed before you start to apply Bio-Oil. To apply, massage in a small amount until it has been fully absorbed.



## REGULAR

You need to be dedicated and ensure you regularly massage and moisturise your scar twice a day for at least 3 months. This will help to speed up the skin's natural regeneration process.



## EXPECTATION

If you are in the care of a nurse or surgeon, ask them how long your scar(s) will take to heal and how you should expect it to look and feel as it heals. Alternatively your local pharmacist can help with advice and recommend useful websites for further information.

## Scar Management Advice

### What can you do to help reduce scarring after surgery or injuring yourself?

“It’s important to follow the aftercare instructions of your surgeon or nurse carefully. You will also receive advice from your nurse once it comes to the stitches being removed, such as how to properly use surgical tape, reducing physical activity and not putting your scar in the sun.”

“The longer a wound takes to heal the worse the scar in my experience. Keeping the wound clean, avoiding stretching and stopping infection are key in preventing healing delays. It is important to follow your post-operative instructions carefully to ensure minimal scarring.”

### When is the best time to improve scars?

“Scars can always be improved no matter what their age. Keloid scars may be active for years and can always be



treated. Acne scarring can be treated for example with laser or micro-needling as can troublesome surgical scars. But the best opportunity to treat a scar is when it is new, keeping it hydrated for example with oil, by not exposing your skin to the sun and not stretching it, will improve its appearance.”

Dr Justine Hextall, Consultant Dermatologist

### Why is it important to acknowledge rather than hide your scars?

“A scar can serve as a reminder of an often traumatic experience and accepting a scar is an important part of coming to terms with this experience. If a scar is affecting someone psychologically then their instinctive reaction can be to cover it up, when it’s out of sight it’s out of mind. But in order to move on, it’s important to acknowledge scars rather than simply hide them away.”

Jo Hemmings, Behavioural Psychologist



## “I learned to embrace my scars” – Jo’s story

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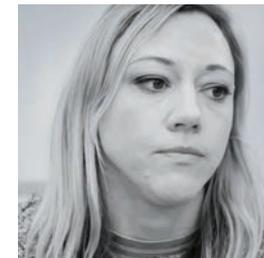
All my life I have had to deal with living with pretty graphic, huge scarring. I was born with two holes in my heart, which has left a scar across my chest by my heart, I also have very large scarring on my back from eight spinal surgeries due to a diagnosis of scoliosis when I was 11. It was a difficult time, just before my teenage years when you feel so self-conscious.

I have really learned how important it is to embrace what may appear to be an imperfection. If not, it can totally paralyse your confidence and leave you feeling isolated.

I’m now proud of my scars and embrace my back scar especially by wearing what I want. It is my ‘mark of courage’ and I so hope others with scars can also learn to share their scar stories and walk tall, proud that they also survived whatever it was that left its mark on their body.

”

Jo Kelly, 33, Middlesex,  
MA Psychology student





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by visiting our social media channels

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