



Anaesthesia, Surgery
and Critical Care

North Bristol **NHS**
NHS Trust

Scar Treatment



Exceptional healthcare, personally delivered

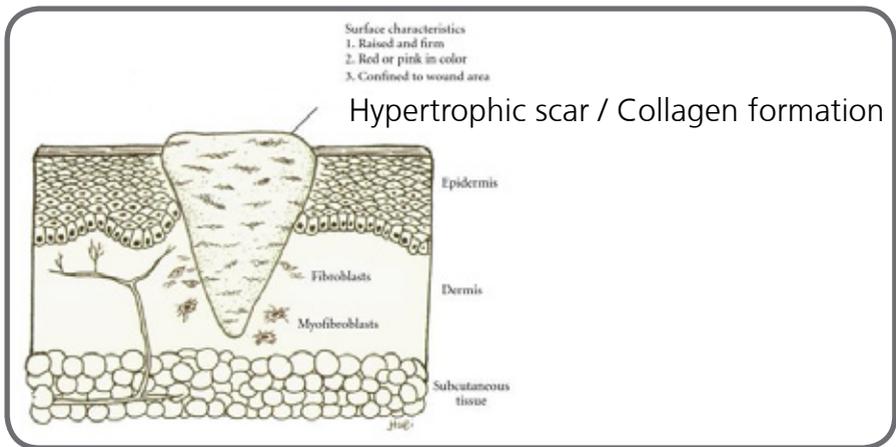
You will be seen by the adult burns team following your burn. At some stage and dependent on the progression of your wound healing you may need to see one of the occupational therapists from the scar management team. This booklet will guide you through the process and aim to provide all the information you require alongside appointments with the scar management team. It would be beneficial if you can bring the booklet to appointments to assist in progressing your treatment as required.

Scar treatment process and timescales.

If your wound has healed on its own without a skin graft within two weeks then it is unlikely that you will develop scarring. The healed area will be red initially and gradually pale over several months. The skin may be dry and require moisturiser initially but you should be able to return to normal activity very quickly and have no long term difficulties.

If the wound takes longer than two weeks or has required a skin graft to the area then the risks of you developing some scarring is higher. For some individuals this scarring will cause no difficulties but they may develop into hypertrophic scars.

The reason for this is that it is likely to have been a deeper injury to the skin and therefore more of the skin structures are damaged. When the wound heals the connective tissue (collagen / scar tissue) is laid down to heal the wound. In burn wounds the inflammatory action that enables wound healing continues beyond the wound closure and can cause the area to become more irregular forming raised, thickened, sensitive, itchy and red scars. This type of scarring is called hypertrophic and can develop up to 3 months post wound healing. The diagram on page 3 shows this process.



There are other factors that can lead to higher risks of problem scars / hypertrophic scars after an injury. These include having an infection that causes the wound to deepen and healing to take longer, if the site of the injury is on areas that are more mobile particularly the chest and top of the shoulder. Your skin type and your genetics can also make you more likely to develop hypertrophic scars.

There are a range of factors associated with hypertrophic scarring that make it important to treat.

- The appearance of scars can make people self-conscious and avoid returning to their normal activities
- Scars across joints can cause problems with movement
- Scars can be painful, tight and uncomfortable
- Scars can be very sensitive
- Scars can be itchy and can lead to scratching and skin breakdown alongside causing difficulties with sleep
- Scars can be dry and result in cracking or breakdowns in the skin
- Scars are more sensitive to the sun and chemicals

Scarring can take up to 2 years and sometimes beyond to mature so treatment may continue for this long.

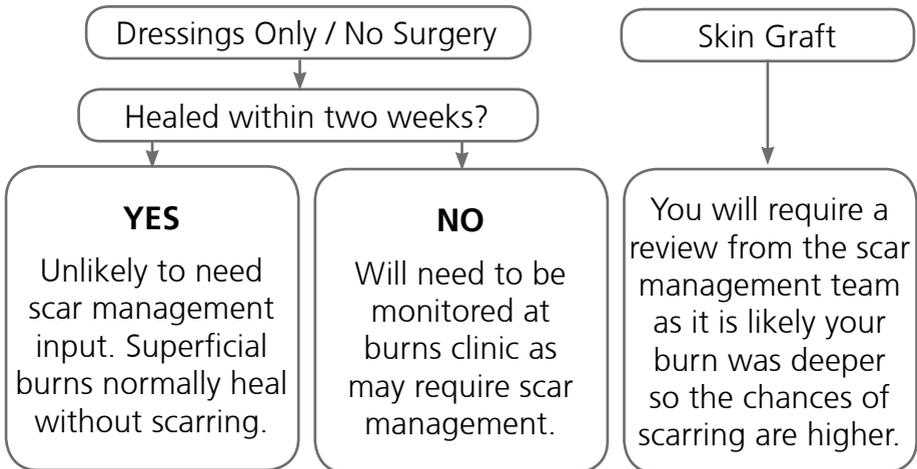
Unfortunately it is not possible to prevent hypertrophic scarring. It is, however, possible to minimise the effects and improve the appearance through:

- Moisturising
- Massage
- Wearing a pressure garment
- Using silicone gels / sprays and sheets
- Carrying out exercises and stretches
- Using splints
- Resuming your normal daily activities as much as you can

Sometimes you may be referred to the burns doctors to assess for extra scar treatments, these may include:

- Medication
- Steroid injections
- Laser treatment

How was your burn wound treated?



Scar treatment options:

Moisturisation

Scars and skin graft donor sites require regular creaming to prevent the area from drying, cracking and becoming sore. This can be because the oil glands in your skin that usually provide moisture can be damaged or destroyed during the injury and the surface layer that prevents water loss is damaged.

It is important to use a non-perfumed moisturiser to keep the area soft and supple and prevent itching. Perfumed creams can react with the newly healed sensitive scars. Your therapist can provide you with some samples of creams if needed.

Moisturisers should be applied gently in thin layers while the scars are more fragile and should be done 2-3 times a day. It is important to fully cleanse the area each day to avoid build-up of cream and skin irritation.

Scar massage

Once your wound has healed we will advise you to commence gentle massage called gliding. Before putting on your moisturiser place your fingers onto the scar and move in gentle circular motions – you are moving your skin not your fingers to prevent friction. Please ask your therapist to demonstrate. Spend a few minutes using this technique then apply your moisturiser.

As the scar matures you can increase the pressure of the massage to help soften scars. Your therapist will guide you in this process as massaging too firmly initially can make scarring worse.

Silicone Therapy

As discussed previously the new skin which has formed following the injury lacks the moisture needed. Silicone then acts to seal in the moisture and hydrate the scar. Silicone treatment aims over time to flatten soften and pale your scar, alongside reducing discomfort.

Silicone can be in the form of a sheet, liquid, spray or stick and if recommended by your therapist they will discuss with you the most appropriate type for your scar.

Precautions:

Some people find they are sensitive to silicone. If you have been given a silicone sheet it is important to build up wearing it daily from 4 hours on the first day of use by an additional 4 hours each day until the required time recommended by your therapist. Check your skin frequently for irritation or rashes over this period. Stop using the silicone and discuss further with your therapist if this does happen. If you know you have sensitive skin it may be advisable to patch test silicones away from your scar first to make sure your skin does not react.

Initial Wearing Schedule for Silicone Sheet:

Day 1 – Wear for 4 hours	Day 2 – Wear for 8 hours	Day 3 – Wear for 12 hours
Day 4 – Wear for 16 hours	Day 5 – Wear for 20 hours	Day 6 – Wear for 23 hours

Silicone gels

- Before being applied, your scar should be fully cleaned as normal.
- Unless otherwise specified by your therapist then these should be applied twice a day once your moisturising cream has absorbed.
- Silicone gels go a long way and only a thin layer is required for effective treatment, if they take longer than a minute to dry then you have put on too much.

Silicone sheet

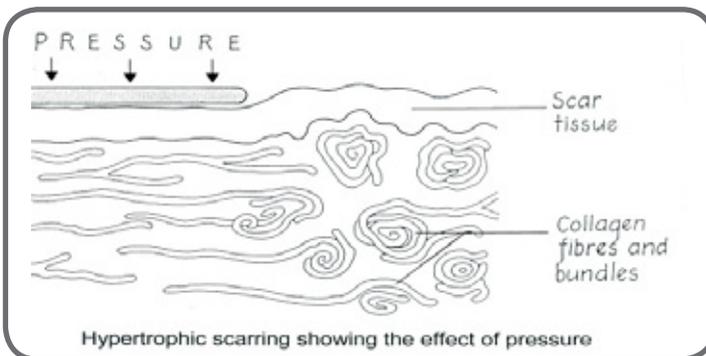
- Your sheet should be cut to size to cover the scar. It is self-adhesive but may require further fixation with a bandage or tape.

- You should wash your sheet twice daily with mild non-oily soap, rinse in warm water, allow to dry then reapply. Use two pieces and rotate between them whilst the washed sheet is drying.
- Before reapplying, cleanse and dry your skin as normal, moisturise and ensure full absorption of the cream.
- Your sheet should be worn for at least 12 hours a day and where possible up to 23 hours a day.
- When the sheet begins to deteriorate and cleaning becomes difficult your gel should be replaced (one piece will last between 1-2 months).
- The ongoing supply of your silicone treatment should be provided by your GP, these are expensive products so please take care of them and use them as advised.

Pressure Garments

These are made to measure elasticated garments worn over your scar with the aim of achieving scars that are flat, soft, pale and comfortable. As stated before they could be required to be worn up to 2 years post healing

They work by applying appropriate levels of pressure to the scar which aims to restrict blood flow / reduce the scar inflammation and inhibit the growth of hypertrophic scar tissue by using constant compression to the area.



To achieve the best possible outcome it is important to wear the garment for 23 hours a day, removing it only to wash, apply moisturiser and change garments.

If your occupational therapist has assessed that pressure therapy is an appropriate treatment for you, they will take measurements and send them to an external provider who make bespoke garments. You will likely be required to attend a fitting appointment 2-3 weeks after being measured for a garment and this is to ensure the best possible fit is achieved. Your garment may require further alteration following this appointment but can then be sent out to you in the post along with your repeat garments. If it is not your first garment we may measure you again and you will be asked to contact us to inform of us of the correct fit before being issued with your repeat garments.

After this you will be reviewed around every 3 months as the elasticity of your garments will reduce and optimum pressure is not achieved. It is important to attend your appointments to monitor the progress of scarring and fit of your garments in order to achieve the best results.

Your garment does not protect you from the suns UVA and UVB rays so high factor sun protection will need to be applied underneath the garment. It is also important to continue with recommended cream and massage whilst wearing a garment.

Care instruction and precautions:

- Your garments are an expensive product so please take good care of your garments and follow the care instructions.
- Garments can be hand washed using non biological product or machine washed on a 30 degree wash programme. Do not use a fabric conditioner.
- Leave garments to air dry please do not tumble dry as this will damage your garment.

- Please contact your therapist should you notice any abnormal swelling, blueness, abnormal sensations or sore or broken skin.

Silontex

Your therapist may also recommend Silontex which is a fabric backed silicone gel sheet that is stitched into your pressure garment.

- It is only suitable to be worn on small areas of scarring.
- It is washed in the same way as your pressure garment.
- Silontex should not be used on unhealed areas or open wounds.

Sun Exposure

Scars are extremely sensitive to sunlight and exposure to the sun without sufficient protection will mean scars burn easily and could cause long term damage darkening the scar which could be irreversible. We recommend high factor sun cream with both UVA and UVB protection on scarred areas for 2 years post burn injury and also covering them with clothing to increase the protection.

Soothing Itching

Itching is unfortunately very common after a burn injury and can continue long after the wound has healed. It can be triggered by activity, heat and manipulation of the scar.

What can I do?

- Apply moisturising cream regularly.
- Creams can be cooled in the fridge prior to application which should have a soothing effect.
- Extremes of temperature can make the itching worse particularly heat so avoid very hot baths or showers.
- Try and cool, rather than scratch the area, use a fan or place a cold towel over the effected area.

If you are still experiencing problems after trying this advice then your therapist can discuss other options and may refer you to one of the burns consultants.

Hypersensitivity

Hypersensitivity is caused by damage to the nerve endings due to injury of the skin. It can be painful and present as tingling, shooting / burning pain or a severe 'pins and needles'. The nerve endings in the scar continue to send pain signals to the brain after the wound is healed when there is no longer a need to protect the area.

If possible it is important to continue normal functional activity as able and not be over protective of the sensitive area, you will not be damaging the area. Your therapist will discuss the techniques with you and which are most appropriate in how to manage the hypersensitivity specifically to your current symptoms.

Desensitisation techniques include:

(Please do not use these techniques until advised by your therapist)

1. Massage the hypersensitive area with moisturising cream

- Start massaging (using small circular motions) at a point where there is normal sensation
- Gradually move up to a point where the discomfort begins and massage that area until the discomfort eases
- Then move up to a point where it feels sensitive and repeat the process
- Continue until you have reached the most sensitive point
- Carry out 3-4 times a day for approximately 10 minutes

2. Stimulate the area with various textures

- Graded textures can be used to stroke the hypersensitive area. Start with soft materials and work up to coarser textures e.g. cotton wool, felt, toweling, rough cloth, Velcro
- If your scar is on your hand or foot they can be immersed in a bowl of materials including: cotton wool, kidney beans, lentils, rice, or pasta
- Carry out 3-4 times a day for approximately 10 minutes. Make sure you are looking at the area whilst carrying out the treatment

Camouflage

It is not uncommon for people to experience some appearance related concerns after a burn. It may be that the appearance of your scar bothers you and you would like to cover it up as much as possible. Your therapist can make a referral to the skin camouflage service where a specialist nurse can trial specific make-up to cover your scar.

Psychology

A burn injury or a scar does not just affect someone's skin but can also influence how they think and feel. Common experiences are feeling low or vulnerable, some can find that the burn incident is going over and over in their minds; they may experience flashbacks, distressing dreams or are avoiding situations which are reminders of the incident. People cope in different ways but some find that it helps to talk to someone outside your family or friendship group. We have a burn psychologist within the team who can listen to you and provide support and possible management strategies as part of your rehabilitation. There is also a support service called Outlook which offers psychological support for people with appearance concerns, your therapist can discuss referral to them with you if required.

Returning to normal activity

Once your wounds are fully healed you should be able to bath or shower as previously using your usual washing products.

You may also be ready to return to work and start doing any sports or hobbies you did previously. You may need a graded return back to work due to reduced range of movement or stamina and are likely to require rest periods during the day dependent on the type of work you do. Please discuss this with your therapist or burns doctor if you require any advice.

Clinic appointments

Scar appointments at Southmead Hospital are held in gate 24. If you have an appointment booked that you can no longer attend or are unsure whether you need the appointment that has been booked for you then please contact us to let us know.

We also run Scar Treatment clinics in Dursley and Tiverton which may be easier for you to attend once you are out of dressings. Please let your therapist know if these are more convenient.

Support contacts

Dan's Fund

A national charity offering practical help to burn survivors in the UK.

www.dansfundforburns.org

Changing Faces

A charity for people and their families who are living with conditions, marks or scars that affect their appearance.

www.changingfaces.com

Katie Piper Foundation

Offers a range of support, rehabilitation and scar management for burns survivors.

www.katiepiperfoundation.org.uk

Outlook

Psychological support for people with appearance concerns.

www.nbt.nhs.uk/outlook

Talkscar

A community sharing experiences and knowledge to make life with scars easier.

www.talkhealthpartnership.com/talkscars/index.php

Useful Websites:

Pressure garment manufacturer:

- **Jobskin**

www.jobskin.co.uk

Silicone Sheet manufacturers:

- **Cica-Care**

<http://www.smith-nephew.com/professional/products/advanced-wound-management/cicacare/>

- **Dermatix**

<http://www.dermatix.co.uk>

Silicone Gel manufacturers:

- **Scarsil**

www.jobskin.co.uk/scarsil-topical-gel

- **Kelacote – Silicone Spray**

www.kelocote.com

- **Prosil – Silicone Stick**

www.amredhealthcare.com/scar_products/pro-sil.html

Here are some examples of non-perfumed creams available but there are many others:

■ **Alhydran**

Available through your GP or online purchase.

<http://www.alhydran.co.uk>

■ **Aveeno**

Available through your local pharmacist, Boots or Superdrug.

<http://www.aveeno.co.uk>

■ **Epaderm**

Available through your GP or Boots.

<http://www.epaderm.com>

■ **QV**

Available through your GP or on Amazon.

<http://www.qvskincare.co.uk/qv-products/>

■ **Dermol and Doublebase**

Available through your GP.

<http://www.diomed.co.uk/dermal-laboratories/hcp-resource/products1/doublebase-range.ashx>

Scar Treatment Programme for

- Moisturisation**
- Initial gentle massage**
- Advance to firmer massage**
- Sun protection for 2 years**

Silicone Therapy - Type:

Instruction on use:

Splint Regime

Pressure Garment - Type:

Instruction on use:

Desensitisation Regime

Detail:

Return to daily activity - Type:

Detail:

**PATIENT
APPROVED** 

How to contact us:

 **Occupational Therapy Service**
Level 6, Gate 10
Brunel building
Southmead Hospital
Bristol
BS10 5NB

Named Therapist

 **07525 618421**
(text or call)

 **smc@nbt.nhs.uk**

 **Appointments**
0300 555 0103

 **www.nbt.nhs.uk/plastics**

If you or the individual you are caring for need support reading this leaflet please ask a member of staff for advice.

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