



## Lymphoedema and Scars

Following surgery or trauma, you may have scars that could have an effect on your lymphatic system. Scars are a part of the healing process. Ideally, they should be flat, supple and have minimal redness after 12–18 months. You can help your scars by adhering to the following advice:

### Looking After Your Scar

#### Look at your scar:

All scars look different during the healing phase but it is important that you to identify any changes in redness, lumpiness and puckering. If you are not happy to look at the scar directly, use a hand mirror to look at the scar without seeing your face in the mirror. This will help with making the scar appear to not belong to you and can be easier to cope with emotionally. If you are having difficulty looking at (or touching) your scar please discuss this with your Lymphoedema therapist.

#### Touch your scar:

This will help your skin and surrounding tissues to feel normal again. It is important that you clean your scar and the surrounding skin every day. If you are not happy to put your hand directly on your scar, try doing this over a soft, clean flannel, or over a thin vest or top.

#### Massage and stretch your scar:

Once your scar has healed, use a lanolin-free cream or oil and gently rub this into your scar in a circular motion. Start gently, focussing on the harder, lumpy areas to soften and reduce the lump. The pressure you use can gradually be increased, providing there is no discomfort or pain, to soften the deeper parts of any lumpy areas.

For more stubborn scars, move your fingers over and around the scar to stretch it. Start with applying gentle pressure and as you gain more confidence, you can apply a firmer touch or stretch to the area. Ask your therapist for advice on how to massage and stretch your scars.

#### Exercise and Stretch:

Exercise is an excellent way to get your scar moving and helps with the recovery of movement. Increased circulation through exercising helps to nourish and heal the underlying tissues of your scar. It is important to discuss and agree with your therapist specific exercises that may help you. Follow the link or QR code below for ideas on exercises and stretches that may help your scar:

#### Silicone and Compression:

These may be of use if your scar is red, raised, puckered, itchy, hard or taut. Silicone works best with compression. Your therapist will advise you on its application if needed.

Follow the link or QR code to view a short video: [www.medic.video/w-lymph](http://www.medic.video/w-lymph)



## Other Post-operative Symptoms

### Nerve disturbance:

Numbness, pins and needles, hypersensitivity, and stabbing pains are all different forms of nerve irritation that can happen following surgery. These effects can be improved by massage and exercise. Sometimes using different textures can ease the symptoms, for example rubbing the area with a towel and then soft sponge. Talk to your therapist for some extra advice.

### Cording and Axillary Web Syndrome:

These are tight bands of tissue that look like guitar strings. They can cause restriction of movement, and in most cases cause pain when stretching. Cording can occur anywhere in your body and is related to surgery. Cording usually starts within the first six months after surgery. If cording appears after six months, it is more likely to be scar tissue tightening from your scar. It is important to massage your scar to help improve the cording.

Your therapist will show you stretching exercises that can help relieve these symptoms as well. Sometimes these cords can 'snap' naturally during activity – there is no need to be worried or alarmed if this does happen. There may also be a need for your therapist to massage and stretch the cords for you, please ask them for assistance if self-massage and stretching is not helping. Please contact your therapist for further advice on how to manage your cording.

### Do's and Don'ts

- Do wash your hands before touching your scar
- Do start touching your scar as soon as the wound is healed – this could be from 14 days after surgery
- When you start massaging, be gentle, as the sensation of your skin may be different
- It is important that your scar is kept clean and dry especially in the skin creases
- Report any redness, leakage, temperature increase, smell, and increase in pain in the scar area to your GP or specialist nurse immediately
- During radiotherapy, follow the skin care advice that you are given by the radiographer
- Do not use aqueous cream – it is a soap substitute and can damage your skin if used as a moisturising cream

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