

A guide to normal scar healing, what to expect at each stage, and how to help your scar mature well.

HOW A SCAR HEALS

Every surgical scar goes through three overlapping biological stages: an inflammatory phase (redness and swelling in the first 1–2 weeks), a proliferative phase (the scar is pink/red, slightly raised and firm from around 2–6 weeks), and a remodelling phase (the scar gradually flattens, softens and fades over several months). Full maturation typically takes 12–18 months, though most of the visible improvement happens within the first 6 months.

TIMELINE

0–2 Weeks — *Protect*

- Leave the dressing intact and dry — do not remove early.
- Do not touch, rub or massage the scar during this stage.
- Do not apply any creams, ointments, oils or powders to the wound.
- No soaking (baths, pools, spas).
- Watch for the warning signs listed below.

2–6 Weeks — *Desensitise*

- Once the wound is fully sealed (no scabs/ooze), begin gentle scar massage.
- Light desensitisation — soft fabrics, gentle touch.
- Start a fragrance-free moisturiser.

6 Weeks–3 Months — *Mature*

- Continue daily massage (1–2 min, firm but comfortable pressure).
- Begin silicone gel or sheeting if scar is raised/red.
- Strict sun protection over the scar.

3–6 Months — *Refine*

- Colour continues to fade, texture softens.
- Continue silicone and sunscreen until pale/flat.
- Review with Dr Hogan if any concerns remain.

NORMAL COLOUR CHANGES

- Pink to red and slightly raised — normal for the first 6–8 weeks.
- Red/purple to brown — common through months 2–4, especially in darker skin types.
- Fading to pale pink, then a pale/silvery line — from around 4–6 months onward, continuing over the following year.
- Mild itching, tightness or occasional twinges are normal during the proliferative and early remodelling phases.

SUN PROTECTION AND PRODUCTS

- New scars pigment very easily — cover the scar with SPF50+ sunscreen (or clothing) whenever exposed to sun for at least 12 months, even after it looks pale, to prevent permanent darkening.
- Once the wound is fully closed, a plain fragrance-free moisturiser is sufficient for most scars.
- For scars that remain raised, red, itchy or firm, silicone gel or silicone sheeting (e.g. Strataderm, Kelo-cote, Cica-Care) applied daily from around 6 weeks is the best-evidenced option to soften and flatten the scar — used for a minimum of 8–12 weeks.
- Scar massage: use firm pressure — a light touch is not effective. Firm circular and longitudinal strokes for 1–2 minutes, 2–3 times daily, help break down adhesions and give the best results.

WHEN TO SEEK REVIEW

- Increasing redness, warmth, swelling or pain after the first week.
- Discharge, pus, or an offensive odour from the wound.
- Wound edges separating or opening.
- Fever or feeling generally unwell.