

Information About Surgical Scars

Why is a new scar red?

When the body begins to heal a wound, it produces scar tissue. It also produces tiny blood vessels. These blood vessels bring extra blood to the wound to help with healing. They make the scar look red. All new scars are red, though more for some people than others.

What happens to a scar over time?

At first, a new scar usually looks red, raised off the skin, and fairly hard to the touch. A scar peaks in color, size and texture after several months (about three months for children.) As it matures, it becomes lighter in color, more level with surrounding skin, and softer to the touch. The whole process can take 12 to 18 months.

How can I make a new scar look better?

With time, most scars get better by themselves. After surgery, an incision needs about two weeks to heal. Then, sunscreen should be used at all times. Sunscreen protects all skin from harmful burns. It also prevents the scar from darkening.

There is evidence that massage and pressure therapy can improve the appearance of a new scar. You can use lotion (any lotion) to massage the scar, at least twice per day.

Will it help to apply creams to a scar?

Many families ask whether skin treatments like Vitamin E, aloe vera, or cocoa butter lotions will improve the long-term appearance of a scar. There is no consistent evidence that these creams will improve scar appearance. Most doctors do not specifically recommend them. However, there is no evidence that they do any harm (except in the rare case of a skin allergy.)

If you choose to apply cream, be sure to wait two weeks after surgery. Ask your surgeon about possible prescription skin treatments.

Will a scar disappear?

Once a person has a scar, it is there forever. When a scar matures, however, it is usually much less obvious than before. Some people heal with less noticeable scars than others.

Once a scar has matured, its appearance does not usually change over time.

How can I make an older scar less visible?

Cosmetics can conceal a scar. Facial hair can cover a scar, though in some cases, the growth pattern of hair may have changed in that area.

In some circumstances, medical treatments can make a scar look less noticeable. Dermabrasion involves "sanding down" a scar to make it more level with the surrounding skin. Surgery can make a scar look thinner and more level with the skin. Your doctor can tell you more about treatment options.

What is a keloid?

A keloid is a thickened, raised scar that grows larger than the original scar. Instead of appearing light, soft, and level, a keloid remains red, raised off the skin, and fairly hard to the touch. It can cause problems like itching, bleeding, burning, or a break-down of skin. Keloids occur more often for people with dark skin tones than lighter skin tones, but overall, they are rare. Your surgeon can tell you more.

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