

Management of Burns Scars

Burn scars may develop due to changes in your body's normal response to wound healing. There is an increase in collagen and blood vessels in the burn area. This makes your burn scar look red and raised.

When will a burn scar develop?

Burn scars are not likely to develop if a burn wound heals within 7 - 10 days. This is usually the case for superficial (minor) burns. The skin may remain pale or pink for a period of time and then return to normal appearance.

During the initial healing stages, deeper burn areas may also appear pink, flat and soft. However when the burn takes longer than 2 weeks to heal or when a skin graft is required, the burn area often changes and becomes:

- thick
- raised
- contracted (skin tightening).

Are all scars the same?

Thickening of scar tissue may initially be felt before the scar looks raised and red in appearance. Burn scars may develop into hypertrophic or keloid scars.

- Hypertrophic scars are generally red, raised and thick.
- Keloid scars extend beyond the original burn wound site.

What other skin changes might I see?

- Skin contractures are tightening and shortening of the burn skin. If not treated, scars and contractures may cause joint stiffness and restrict normal movement.
- Skin pigmentation (skin colour), may become darker or lighter after a burn. Sun exposure may increase hyper-pigmentation (skin darkening) which may not resolve.

What is the treatment for burn scars?

Ongoing treatment is required when burns take more than 2 weeks to heal or need a skin graft.

Burn scar treatment may include:

- compression garments
- scar massage
- silicone products
- splinting
- maintaining normal movement during daily activities

Early scar treatment (before the scar becomes visibly raised and red) is essential for best results.

When your scars mature (stop changing) they will no longer respond to scar treatment. Your Occupational Therapist (OT) and doctor will discuss with you when to stop your compression garments and silicone products.

What other things do I need to know?

- Avoid scratching or rubbing scars because this stimulates scar growth.
- Use a chemical free moisturiser (with no fragrances or colours) to prevent skin dryness.
- See your doctor immediately if you suspect your burn skin has become infected.
- Protect your skin from sunburn. Compression garments do not provide sun protection. Use maximum protection sunscreen, wear a broad-brimmed hat and wear protective clothing.
- Wear your garment as prescribed by your OT and cover any wounds with dressings.
- Be sure your compression garments are fitting firmly. If they become loose contact your OT immediately (do not wait until your next burns clinic appointment).
- Use splints as prescribed by your OT to correct skin contractures and to prevent deformities.
- Return to work as soon as approved by your doctor.
- Avoid sports that may cause skin abrasions until advised by your doctor or therapist.

Please contact your Occupational Therapist if you have any queries or concerns.

Occupational Therapist: _____

Phone: (07) 3646 7100