

Scars and what to do about them

A scar forms as a normal part of the skin's healing process. Scars may form from surgery, trauma (accidents, burns, etc.), infections such as chicken-pox, or inflammation in the skin such as acne.

TYPES OF SCARS

Scars may be flat, indented, or raised. Scars may be lighter or darker in color, pink or red. Hypertrophic scars and keloid scars form when an excessive amount of scar tissue is formed, making the scar more raised than usual. A **hypertrophic** scar is an exaggerated type of scar but stays within the edges of the injury. A **keloid** scar spills over beyond the edges of the injury and may grow much like a tumor.

The type of scar depends on many factors including age, location on body, and skin type. In time, most scars become less noticeable, but scars do not go away completely.

WHEN TO SEEK TREATMENT FOR A SCAR

In most people, scars do not cause significant problems. Patients may seek treatment for scars for different reasons:

- » **Emotional/social:** Scars may develop on very visible areas of the body or may be a reminder of a traumatic event. Scars in these situations may cause significant stress.
- » **Symptoms:** Some scars may cause symptoms such as pain, itching, tingling, or numbness.
- » **Limitation of function:** Some scars may limit activities by making it hard to move the body part with the scar.

KELOIDS

Keloids are a special type of scar that become larger than the original wound. These can form even after a minor injury. Predicting when and if a keloid will form is not possible, but they may be more likely to form in certain anatomic locations such as the earlobes.

Keloids can be difficult to treat. The goal of treatment is to improve the symptoms and appearance. The following treatment options are available for this type of scar:

- » Injection of corticosteroids or other medications into the keloid
- » Silicone sheets and gels
- » Compression earrings, garments, or devices
- » Cryotherapy
- » Laser
- » Surgery
- » Radiation

WHAT TREATMENTS ARE AVAILABLE?

Different treatment options are available for scars. The type of treatment depends on the type of scar, location, age, and how bothersome the scar is. The goal of treatment is to make a scar feel and look better. Treatments do not make scars disappear entirely but can help them fade more quickly and become less noticeable.

AVAILABLE TREATMENTS (CONT.)

Treatment options include: topical products (creams, ointments, patches), injections, laser, chemical peels, dermabrasion, cryotherapy (freezing with liquid nitrogen), radiation, and surgery.

HOW TO MINIMIZE A SCAR

Scars cannot always be prevented. The following are recommendations for reducing the appearance of scars caused by injury:

- » **Wound care:** After a surgery or an injury, follow your doctor's wound care instructions closely. This will allow the best healing possible. Most non-surgical wounds heal best when they are kept clean and covered with a bandage that keeps them from getting too wet or too dry.
- » **Sun protection:** This will prevent darkening of the scar.
- » **Scar massage:** Regular massage of the scar can help to make it softer and flatter.
- » **Other local measures** like downward pressure with silicone sheet, steri strips, or tape may also help with scar formation.

YOUR DOCTOR RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING TREATMENTS:



The Society for Pediatric Dermatology
8365 Keystone Crossing, Suite 107
Indianapolis, IN 46240
(317) 202-0224
www.pedsderm.net

Contributing SPD Member:
Esteban Fernandez-Faith, MD

Committee Reviewers:
Irene Lara-Corrales, MD
Erin Mathes, MD

Expert Reviewer:
Bari Cunningham, MD

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