

Answers to Common Questions About Scars

Why are new scars red?

All new scars are red, though more so in some people than in others. When the body first begins to heal a wound it produces a lot of scar tissue. In order to nourish this healing process, the body creates many tiny blood vessels to bring in a temporary supply of extra blood, causing a red color. Scars in children typically get progressively redder for perhaps three months. During this time the scar will often be raised off the skin and fairly stiff to the touch.

What will the scar look like in the future?

Scars generally reach a peak after several months, gradually becoming softer, flatter, and lighter in color.

Do scars go away?

Once a person has a scar, it is there forever. However, when the scar matures it should be much less noticeable than when it was new. Some people heal with less obvious scars than others, so the scar may be very fine or, at the other extreme, very wide. Scars normally take 12 to 18 months to mature.

Will applications of vitamin E help the scar?

Many people believe that there are special healing qualities to vitamin E, aloe vera, or cocoa butter. In fact, there is no consistent evidence that these ointments will truly improve the long-term appearance of the scar. Since a normal scar will spontaneously improve, people may mistakenly think that the improvement is due to vitamin E they are applying. Although most doctors do not specifically recommend the use of vitamin E, there is no evidence that it will do any harm,

except in the rare instances of skin allergy. However, it should be avoided during the first two weeks after surgery. Ask your doctor about creams that may be available by prescription.

What can I do to make a new scar look better?

Since the scar will get better by itself, you generally just need to wait. However, many doctors believe that applying sun screen for three to four months after surgery is beneficial, because some people can develop permanent excess color in a scar as a result of early sun exposure.

What can be done to make an older scar less visible?

Once the scar has matured (become soft and white), it should not be expected to undergo further spontaneous changes. However, sometimes the scar is not as refined as might be possible. In this situation, your surgeon may recommend cutting out and re-closing a portion of the scar in an attempt to make it thinner or more level with the surrounding skin. Another possible treatment is dermabrasion, a process that involves sanding down the scar surface, again in an effort to make it more level with the surrounding skin. Adults may also choose to wear make-up or grow facial hair to camouflage a scar.

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What is a keloid?

A keloid is a tumor of scar tissue that can develop when the body continues to make new scar tissue of many months or even years, rather than letting the scar mature normally and become white and flat. A keloid is a scar that is permanently red, hard, and raised. Fortunately, keloid scars are fairly rare. Your surgeon can tell you more about them.

For further information on cleft lip and palate, or for a referral to a cleft palate/craniofacial team, please contact:

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