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Paragon Orthopedic Center

Grants Pass, Oregon

Treating Scars



Look in the “skin care” aisle of your local store and you will find several offerings for scar treatment. Many of us have scars from mishaps or surgeries, and when they appear in noticeable places, most people would like them gone. If your scar is in a place where there is frequent motion, such as the knee or shoulder, your body is more likely to develop a noticeable scar. It’s difficult to know which remedies are fake cures and which produce real results. Here is some information to help you understand scarring better and available treatments.

TYPES OF SCARS

Contracture-frequently seen in burns, causing the skin to tighten.

Depressed-sunken scars, often seen from chicken pox and acne.

Flat-starting out as raised, then heal level to the surrounding skin.

Keloid-raised and thickened above the skin’s surface and spreading beyond the wound.

Raised-like a keloid, but these don’t spread beyond the wounded area.

Stretch Marks-when skin expands or shrinks, as seen in weight gain/loss and pregnancy.

WHY DOES SKIN SCAR?

Scars are the result of abnormal or excess formation of collagen in the skin after an injury. Your age, genes, overall health and ethnicity are factors that can affect how you form scars.

AGE: You are more likely to develop a keloid scar between the ages of 20-30.

GENES: Keloids run in families, so if your family members develop keloids, you will likely as well.

OVERALL HEALTH: Having low levels of vitamins C or D can make scarring worse. Protein is needed for skin to heal, so you need to have an adequate amount of it in your diet.

ETHNICITY: People with darker skin form keloids more frequently than other ethnicities.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO AVOID A SCAR?

Dr. Bents advises his patients to keep their surgical wounds clean and dry. Also, **keep the wound covered**. Exposure to sun will worsen any discoloration of the wounded area and cause the tissue to thicken. Scars are very sensitive, so they brown quickly. This discoloration and tissue thickening make any sort of treatment more difficult. If the area is on your face, liberally apply sunscreen with an SPF of at least 50.

DO DRUGSTORE REMEDIES WORK?

Most drugstore remedies do not have any effect on scars.

Vitamin E is an ingredient in some scar-healing products, known for properties that lessen inflammation, but it hasn’t been proven to do much for scars. When it works, it is likely the result of the moisturizing effect that simply keeps the skin hydrated. Some people develop allergic reactions or skin irritations to Vitamin E, thus making healing more difficult.

Onion extract is another ingredient found in drug store creams (such as Mederma) but is not scientifically proven to help.

One over-the-counter product that research has shown to help is *silicone*. It is often found as an adhesive sheet that sticks to the scar. Some experts think this works on scars because of the pressure that is applied to the skin through the bandage. It's a slow process when you use this product and can be very expensive, with estimates at \$40/month. Silicone can require up to two full years of use for full healing, requiring patience and diligence.

ARE ANY HOME REMEDIES USEFUL?

None is a guaranteed cure. Stay away from folksy home remedies, such as rubbing lemons or onions on the scar. These can be irritating and kill the healthy cells. Research has shown honey to be effective at promoting *wound healing*, but there isn't any significant research that proves it to be helpful with scars.

MASSAGE THERAPY

You can try gently massaging the scar two weeks after stitches have been removed, and well after the scab has fallen off. Ensure there is no risk of reopening the wound. Tissue massage can prevent scar tissue buildup, puckering of the skin at its edges, and help range of motion. For lubrication, use a quality lotion without added scent, like Nivea or Eucerin or Vitamin E oil. Certain additives can cause skin irritation. Ask for guidance from your healthcare provider.

CAN I TATTOO OVER A SCAR TO MINIMIZE IT?

Scar tissue does not behave like the rest of your skin. Tattooing a scar can result in a worse appearance in some instances. If you are prone to keloid scars, you have a higher chance of worsening the scar with a tattoo. When a tattoo is attempted on a scar, the ink tends to bleed, making the appearance irregular or blurred. Another consideration is that tattooing a scar has been found to be more painful. Tattoos done over scars that are deep or wide will be more painful than those done over mild scarring. Seek a tattoo artist who will consider the type of scar you have, the best design to cover your scar knowing how the ink will react, and has the experience to give you good advice.

HOW WILL A SCAR AFFECT MY TATTOO?

Skilled surgeons are able to match up edges of the wound to help conceal a scar. Dr. Bents has had many happy patients by navigating a careful closure in shoulder and knee surgeries to keep a tattoo intact and minimize a noticeable scar.

ARE MEDICAL PROCEDURES WORTH THE COST?

Laser therapy has been shown to help thick or red scars. Cortisone injections are used to flatten thick or raised scars. A certified Dermatologist can determine if either of these would be helpful. These can be expensive, sometimes up to \$500 a treatment, and require more than one procedure for optimal results. In some instances, you might replace an ugly scar with another type of scar that has an improved appearance.

If you try any scar treatment and the area shows signs of infection, such as pain, redness, bleeding, tenderness, or drainage, consult your healthcare professional immediately.



The following articles were referenced for this newsletter:

[Scars: Treatment and Cause \(clevelandclinic.org\)](https://www.clevelandclinic.org/health/condition/28999/keloid-scar)

[Keloid scar - Symptoms and causes - Mayo Clinic](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/keloid-scar/symptoms-causes/slc-20074994)

[The Efficacy of Silicone Gel for the Treatment of Hypertrophic Scars and Keloids \(nih.gov\)](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26111111/)

[Tattoo Over a Scar: What to Know, Pain Level, and More \(healthline.com\)](https://www.healthline.com/health/tattoo-over-a-scar)