

Burns Scar Management Clinic (page 1 of 4)



Why do I need to be seen at the Burns Scar Management Clinic?

After a burn injury, some degree of scarring may be likely. The severity of this scarring is determined by a number of factors, such as:

- the depth of the burn
- the length of time your burn has taken to heal.

We know that the longer the healing time of your wound, the greater is the risk of scarring. If you have had a deep burn that has taken a long time to heal or have had a skin graft, you may develop some hypertrophic, or abnormal, scars. These scars are defined as red, raised and hard. They can also sometimes be sensitive, painful and itchy. As you heal, the clinic or ward staff will have discussed scarring with you. If necessary you will be referred to our Scar Management Clinic.

The aim is to help you care for your newly-healed burn wounds and to provide appropriate treatment for your scars. We hope to be able to improve the appearance of your scars as they naturally mature.

Where and when is the clinic held?

Every other Thursday in the Salisbury Laser Clinic.

When will I be given an appointment?

Within one month of being discharged from the Burns Dressings Clinic. You may not be completely healed. If you are unable to attend your appointment, please inform the Burns Unit as soon as possible on 01722 345507.

What does it involve?

Scarring can take up to 2 years to mature. Some people will need treatment during this time. Once your treatment begins, you will be reviewed regularly, as required, at your clinic appointment. We make every effort to keep the number of appointments to a minimum. We aim to achieve this by making various members of staff available to you at each visit.

Who will I see at the clinic?

The clinic is run by an occupational therapist and a clinical scientist from the Burns Unit. If necessary, you may also be seen by a physiotherapist, nurse, clinical psychologist, maxillofacial prosthetist or a burns consultant.

If you need your information in another language or medium (audio, large print, etc) please contact Customer Care on 0800 374 208 or send an email to: customer care@salisbury.nhs.uk

You are entitled to a copy of any letter we write about you. Please ask if you want one when you come to the hospital.

If you are unhappy with the advice you have been given by your GP, consultant, or another healthcare professional, you may ask for a second (or further) opinion.

The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

What happens at the clinic?

We will ask you a few questions about your thoughts on the scarring and how it may be troubling you. We will look at all aspects of your scars, but specifically at the colour, stiffness and thickness. The therapist will check if the scar is causing any change to your range of movement. These assessments will not cause any pain or discomfort. We may ask to take a photograph of your scar for your records and to assess your scar using a scar assessment scale. This will help us monitor your scar as it progresses. Once we have done all this, we will then decide on treatments that may be suitable for you.

It may be that your wound needs some attention from the Nurse or the Burns Consultant in the early stages of scar management. This can be arranged during your appointment. We can also refer you directly if you wish, to Clinical Psychology if the scar is affecting you emotionally.

What treatments are available for scarring?

Moisturising and massage

You must keep your newly-healed skin well moisturised, as this may improve the appearance and pliability of your scars. You should use a simple, non-perfumed moisturiser. We recommend you use one that 'works for you', though we can advise further at your appointment.

Massage the cream in to the healed skin at least 2-3 times a day to ensure that the scar area does not dry out. Massage involves application of medium to firm pressure in small circular movements over the affected area. We can advise you on how to do this at the clinic. It is very important that the skin is cleansed in between each moisturising session as any build-up of cream may cause skin irritation.

Silicone gel or silicone sheeting

Silicone treatment is commonly used to improve the appearance of immature scars. It helps to keep the scar moisturised by sealing the moisture in. Silicone appears to prevent moisture being lost from the scar and in this way keeps it hydrated. Good levels of hydration are known to improve the scar.

Silicone gel is applied in a thin layer over the scar 2-3 times a day, usually a short time after moisturisation. Alternatively, silicone sheets can be applied to the scar and left in place. This silicone layer helps to soften and smooth the area and, in some cases, can relieve pain and itching.

Pressure garments

These are close fitting garments, which exert pressure on the scars. If used correctly, they can help to reduce the thickness and stiffness of your scars. They can be used in conjunction with silicone to maximise improvements in appearance. There are two types of pressure garment; interim or 'off the shelf' garments are used for a trial period whilst the scar remains delicate, and custom-made garments which are made according to your exact measurements. For best results, we recommend that patients wear their pressure garments for 23 hours a day, only removing them for washing. Do not wash them with biological powder. The effectiveness of the pressure garment will be monitored at clinic and their use will be reviewed every 2-3 months. They may need to be replaced as they become worn.

Laser treatment

Laser treatment may be offered as a treatment in the Laser Clinic at the hospital. There are two options. The Pulsed Dye Laser is offered when the scar is young, red and itchy. This treatment can help both to improve the colour of your scar and to relieve itching. In some cases, it can also help the scar to flatten and become softer. The Fractionated (Erbium:YAG) laser is used for the stiffer scars once they have started to mature. This laser has been shown to help both to soften and flatten the scar.

The Clinic Scientist or therapist will discuss this option if it is appropriate for you. They will then refer you for treatment, if needed.

Exercises and splinting

Scar tissue is less flexible than normal skin. Therefore you may notice that some areas feel tight and you may experience some restriction in movement. You will probably have been given some exercises by the Physiotherapist and it is important that you do these regularly. You may need to be fitted with a splint, a device to exert pressure on your scar. You must wear this as directed but if it doesn't fit properly, you should contact your therapist to arrange adjustment.

Camouflage make-up

Ask the clinic staff if you would like to be referred for advice about camouflage make-up for scars. More information can be found at www.changingfaces.org.uk

More information on all of these treatments will be given to you at the clinic.

Frequently asked questions

Why do blisters occur after I have healed?

Newly healed skin is extremely delicate and the slightest irritation, such as rubbing from clothes or scratching, may cause blistering. The blisters should gradually reduce in size and disappear. If they pop, clean the area and cover with a simple non-adherent dressing until healed. Avoid wearing your pressure garment until the blisters have healed.

Why does the scar change colour?

The healed skin may appear pink, dark pink, red or purple. Changes in colour are part of the natural scar maturation process. However, changes in body temperature, such as due to the weather or during exercise, will also affect the colour of the scar. Over time, the scar colour will fade.

Do I need to protect my scars from the sun?

Yes. You need to protect your newly-healed skin from the sun. This is especially important while your scars mature, this can take up to 2 years. Try to keep the area covered but, when this is not possible, a sunscreen with SPF 30+ (and a star rating of 3 or more) should be used that protects against both UVB and UVA rays. Try to avoid the sun when it is strongest between 10am and 3pm. Please ask clinic staff for our patient information leaflet "Burns Scars – Spending time outdoors".

Why is my burn itchy?

As your burn heals, it may become itchy. Try not to scratch the newly healed skin. Moisturising the area and wearing loose-fitting, cotton clothing should ease itching. If this doesn't help, an anti-histamine medication can be bought over the counter at your local pharmacy. If the area is particularly itchy, you may ask to be referred for laser treatment.

Can I go swimming? Can I take exercise?

When your burn has completely healed, you can go swimming. Chlorine can dry out your skin so it is important to shower and moisturise afterwards to prevent your skin becoming dry. Exercise can help your scar from stiffening by keeping it mobile and we encourage you to exercise whenever you wish or feel able.

Where can I find out more information?

The Burns Unit – 01722 345507 or the Laser Clinic 01722 336262 ext. 3183

B.U.G.S is our charity run by volunteers who provide help and support to those affected by burn injuries. Please talk to a member of staff if you would like more information or visit the website: www.bugssalisbury.co.uk

Some helpful websites

You may also find the following websites of interest:

Dan's Fund for Burns is here to help you if you are a burn survivor. The prime aim of Dan's Fund for Burns is to be a ready source of assistance by providing swift and practical support for UK-wide burn survivors in need.

www.dansfundforburns.org

The Katie Piper Foundation's vision is to have a world where scars do not limit a person's function, social inclusion or sense of well-being. Their aims are to improve outcomes for burns survivors, deliver (directly or indirectly) intensive, comprehensive burns rehabilitation (post-acute care discharge) in the UK and support burns survivors throughout their recovery

www.katiepiperfoundation.org.uk

Changing Faces began its work in 1992 to help people who have a disfigurement find a way to live the life they want. They aim to support adults, children and families to live confident, happy lives.

www.changingfaces.org.uk

The Scar Free Foundation is a national charity championing the cause of people living with disfigurement and visible loss of function, by funding research into pioneering surgical and psychological healing techniques.

www.scarfree.org.uk