

Scar Healing: Types, Treatments and Holistic Care

Scars are a natural part of the body's healing process, but they can vary significantly in appearance, cause, and treatment options. This leaflet explores three common types of scars – keloid, hypertrophic, and atrophic – providing insights into their characteristics, why they form, and how they can be managed.



KELOID SCARS

Keloid scars are a result of the body's enthusiastic healing process, where excessive collagen production leads to a raised, often sizable, scar that stretches beyond the original incision area. Unlike other scars, keloids can continue to grow and expand over time, not just in width but sometimes in height, creating a noticeable and often sensitive mound of scar tissue.

Formation and Characteristics

- **Excessive Growth:** The skin continues producing collagen, leading to a thick, raised scar.
- **Characteristics:** They are often darker, with a shiny, smooth surface and can be itchy or painful especially when touched or if they are in areas of the body that experience frequent movement.
- **Growth Beyond Wound:** Keloids uniquely extend beyond the wound's original borders.

Risk Factors

- **Genetics:** A family history of keloid scars increases risk.
- **Skin Tone:** More common in individuals with darker skin.
- **Age:** Primarily affects people between 10 to 30 years old.
- **Location:** More likely to develop on the chest, shoulders, and earlobes.



HYPERTROPHIC SCARS

Hypertrophic scars are raised, red scars that form along the site of a wound, staying within its original borders. Unlike keloid scars, hypertrophic scars do not grow beyond the wound's edges and may improve over time. However, they can still be prominent and cause discomfort or restricted movement, depending on their location.

Formation and Characteristics

- **Concentrated Growth:** These scars result from an excessive but localised production of collagen.
- **Characteristics:** Hypertrophic scars are thick, raised, and red. They can be sensitive and may restrict certain movements.
- **Contained Growth:** Their growth is confined to the original wound area, and they sometimes become less raised within one to two years.

Risk Factors

- **Wound Location:** as c-section scars are on the abdomen, this area is prone to hypertrophic scarring. Also, 50% of all scars become hypertrophic.
- **Delayed Healing:** Wounds that take longer to heal or become infected are at increased risk.
- **Individual Healing Response:** Variations in individual skin healing can influence the likelihood of developing hypertrophic scars.



ATROPHIC SCARS

Atrophic scars are indentations left in the skin where tissue has been lost, commonly resulting from conditions like acne or chickenpox. These scars give the skin a pitted appearance and can vary in depth and size, significantly affecting the skin's texture and appearance. With a c-section scar, an atrophic scar can be flat, white, pinned in and not red or raised. Atrophic scars can still feel tight.

Formation and Characteristics

- **Formation:** Early on in your scar recovery you may notice your c-section scar becoming flatter, going pale and starting to "blend in with your skin."
- **Appearance:** Flat, pale, can feel tight and pull on surrounding tissues, thinner

scar line. No red or raised or thick.

- **Early, gentle, intervention** with your scar can help promote the formation of a hypertrophic scar, as your scar heals.

Risk Factors

- **Healing Capacity:** Individuals who produce less collagen production, may be more prone to these scars.
- **Genetics:** There's a genetic component to how skin heals, which can predispose some people to atrophic scarring.



THE ROLE OF A SCAR THERAPY SPECIALIST

Scar therapy specialists can provide tailored treatments for the unique challenges presented by each scar type tailored to address specific concerns such as scar thickness, coloration, texture, and any associated discomfort or movement issues relating to your scar. They will also ask you about how you "feel" about your scar and your relationship with your scar recovery and offer emotional and practical support where appropriate.



ADVANCED TECHNIQUES

For keloid and hypertrophic scars, first line treatments may include silicone sheets or gels to help flatten and soften the scar. Special scar massage techniques will be used on these specialist scars, to help with mobility of the scar and the pulling sensation that these scars may cause. Further down the line, steroid injections to reduce inflammation and size of scar may be used (and administered by a trained injection specialist).

In the case of atrophic scars, scar specialists might focus on scar massage, medical devices to improve the scars appearance and gently work on how tight the scar may feel to you.

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