



An tOspidéal Náisiúnta Máithreachais
The National Maternity Hospital

Physiotherapy Department

Scar Management



A step by step guide
to managing your c-
section scar



Introduction

The healing of your scar begins immediately post operation. This happens in stages.

Stage One: Homeostasis

Blood rushes to the site of the wound and clotting occurs, stopping the bleed. This process begins immediately.

Stage two: Inflammation

Once homeostasis is achieved (usually within a few minutes) cells are sent to repair the wound. The wound heats up, pain increases, redness spreads. This can persist up to around day four.

Stage three: Proliferation

The tissue around the wound contracts, drawing the wound smaller and closing the skin. This usually occurs from around day four up to day 21.

Stage four: Re-modelling

After around 21 days, the deeper structures begin to form, giving the wound tensile strength. This process can continue for around two years. It's during this time that problems with the scar can occur.

Scar Massage

The scar massage information and images used in this handout are from Kathie Wallace, PT, BCB-PMD, 2014. Click [HERE](#) for a direct link to the original handout.

You can begin scar massage from 6 weeks post birth and when the superficial skin has healed.

There are two stages for massage of abdominal scars:

Stage One involves stretching and desensitizing the skin around the scar.

Stage Two involves stretching and desensitizing the skin directly on/ over the scar.

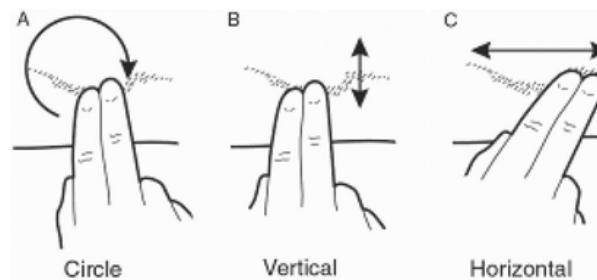
Stage One: Skin stretching and desensitizing the scar

You can begin Stage One six weeks after your surgery or later.

You should do both of the following activities for maximum benefit. Always have clean hands with little to no lotion.

Skin Stretching Directions:

1. Place your fingers 2 to 3 inches from your scar.
2. Stretch the skin around the scar area by moving your fingers up and down. Make up-and-down motions around the entire scar.
3. Stretch the skin around the scar area by moving your fingers side to side. Make side-to-side motions around the entire scar.
4. Stretch the skin by making circles above and below the scar in a clockwise and counterclockwise direction.
5. Massage completely around the scar with each of these three movements 5 to 10 times.



Tips: Try applying different depths of pressure with your fingertips depending on your comfort level. You may feel a pull or light burning when you are stretching the skin around the scar during these activities. If you feel an area that does not move easily, or is extra sensitive, do a few more skin stretches over that area.

Desensitization to Around the Scar:

1. Use a wet hand towel or wash cloth. Start at the end of your scar and rub the cloth around the scar; first with up and down, then side-to-side, and finally in circles (as in the patterns for skin stretching above).
2. Work across the entire length of the scar (above and below) 5 times with each of the different movement patterns.
3. Do this daily after bathing until there is no sensitivity to touching the scar.

Stage Two: Direct Scar Stretching and Desensitization

You can begin Stage Two twelve weeks after your surgery or later.

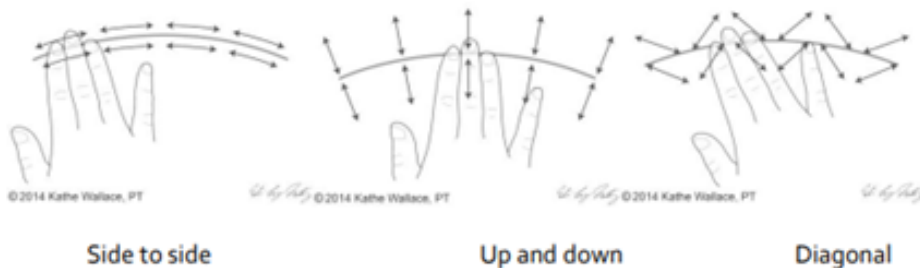
Set aside 5 to 10 minutes for each session of Direct Scar Massage and Skin Lift and Roll.

Direct Scar Massage:

1. Hold the pads of two or three fingers together. The fingers should be slightly arched, as in the picture.



2. Place the pads of your fingers directly on one end of the scar.
3. Stretch the scar by pushing your fingers about half an inch in one direction as indicated by the black arrow. Hold the scar stretched for 5 to 15 seconds.
4. Now stretch the scar opposite to the direction to step 3.
5. Hold the scar stretched for 5 to 15 seconds.
6. Move over to the next area of your scar and repeat the scar stretches as above. Work your way along the entire length of the scar.
7. Repeat 5 to 10 passes along the scar.



Scar Lift and Roll Directions:

1. Pick up the scar between your index finger and thumb.
2. Roll the scar between your fingers for 5 to 15 seconds.
3. Move along the scar and repeat until you have massaged the entire length of the scar.



Gradually progress towards using firmer pressure when doing 'direct scar massage' and 'scar lift and roll' for maximum benefit.

Other Considerations

Reduce risk of infection. Keep the area clean. Your midwife will give you guidance on the early care of your wound prior to your discharge from hospital.

Avoid sun exposure. Avoiding exposure to sunlight and the continued use of sunscreens with a high to maximum sun protection factor (>50) until the scar has matured.

Limit strain or tension on the wound. While your wound is still healing, limit any excessive straining or tensing of your tummy muscles. This includes constipation/straining on the toilet, a premature increase in activity or repetitive 'sitting up' movements day to day. Follow the advice on our recovery after c-section leaflet.

Moisturise the tissue. After 6 weeks when the wound has healed, it is important to keep the scar tissue moisturised. This can be done with moisturising emollient and humectant creams.

Silicone therapy: Moisture-retentive dressings such as silicone sheets and fluid silicone gel can also be used. This can be helpful for hypertrophic* and keloid scarring**.

Pressure therapy. Wearing soft and supportive underwear or clothing is safe to wear over the wound. Any rigid or boned abdominal shape wear is not recommended.

If you have any concerns about the healing or appearance of your scar, please seek a review with your healthcare provider.



**Hypertrophic scar: A hypertrophic scar is one which has proliferated to a size larger than expected for the wound, without extending beyond its original wound margins.*



***Keloid Scar: Keloids are characterized by excessive scar tissue. The keloid is a benign fibrous growth that presents itself in scar tissue as a result of altered wound healing.*

HEALTHY BODIES AFTER BIRTH

An information session on caring and reconnecting with your body as it recovers after birth

Topics include:

- Bladder & Bowel Care
- Abdominal Care
- Pelvic Floor Advice
- Returning to Movement
- and more!

Every Friday at 11am



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Physiotherapist led information session
Email njordan@nmh.ie to book your place

www.nmh.ie

References;

1. Monstrey S et al. Updated scar management practical guidelines: non-invasive and invasive measures. *J Plast Reconstr Aesthet Surg.* 2014 Aug 1;67(8):1017-25.
2. Kathe Wallace PT, *Massage For Your Abdominal Scar.* 2014
3. *Scar management, Physiopedia.* Available at: https://www.physio-pedia.com/Scar_Management (Accessed: 28 August 2024).

