

Plastic Surgery

How to Manage a Skin Graft

What is a Skin Graft?

A skin graft involves taking a piece of skin from one area of the body, known as the donor site and transferring it to another part of the body. The piece of skin removed, is the skin graft and then used to cover an area when something has been removed such as a suspected skin cancer, burn or any trauma. The skin graft is very thin and so can sometimes leave the area covered, indented.

How to manage your skin graft & donor site

You will have a dressing on the graft which will remain in place for 1 week. The donor site will also have a dressing in place and this one will need to stay on for 2 weeks.

You will get 2 appointments for the dressing clinic:

- One appointment for the skin graft dressing to be removed, usually one week later
- One appointment for the donor site dressing to be removed, 2 weeks later

If you do not need any further dressings you will no longer need to attend the dressing clinic, however, sometimes you may need to attend for a few weeks. This is because some people heal quicker than others.

Skin grafts have fewer oil and sweat glands and so may become dry; therefore you need to keep the skin graft moist, using vaseline or any moisturiser directly onto the graft a couple of times during the day, if your graft is looking dry.

The donor site will heal like a graze and so once your dressing has been removed, you can apply Vaseline or a moisturiser for comfort if needed, but this area can be dry. The colour of the donor site will fade overtime. The donor site often causes more discomfort than the graft site. Paracetamol should help, although this is not always necessary. No more than 8 paracetamol to be taken in 24hrs.

Bathing

Do not get the graft site wet for the first 48hrs. The donor site will need to be kept dry longer as the dressing remains in place for 2 weeks. Please do not disturb the dressing. If you notice the dressing coming off at the edge, tape over the top with any tape you have at home.

Bruising

It is normal to have some bruising after surgery, this will settle over the next few weeks. Some people bruise more than others, especially if they are taking medication which thins the blood.

Resting

If your skin graft was on the leg, please try and elevate the leg when possible in the first week. If your skin graft was on the face, try not to lean forward more than necessary in the first week.

Scars

Scars take approximately 18 months to heal completely. **Massage the scar, firmly, with Vaseline or a moisturiser of your choice, up and outwards towards the heart**, this will help to mature the scar and can sometimes appear less lumpy over time.

Try to get familiar with your skin graft, you will not damage the skin, it will not come off.

Signs of infection

Redness / pus leaking from the graft / donor site / smelly / hot to touch / swelling

Any bleeding or any of the above signs that you are concerned about please get in touch on the number below and we will get back to you.

Sutures

Depending on which type of sutures (stitches) your consultant has used these may need removing and this will be done in the dressing clinic, usually, within 5-7 days. Dissolvable sutures do not need removing; these will dissolve over the next fortnight or so. If they are still visible after this time or causing discomfort, please get in touch.

Sunlight

The skin graft will be more sensitive to sunlight and so it is important to protect these areas, especially during the first year. Should these areas burn it would be very painful and may look worse. Apply a sun cream factor 30 or above to this area at all times.

There are camouflage creams available if you are concerned about the appearance of your skin graft, please speak with your consultant or GP to find out more.

Tattoo

If you have had a graft in the middle of your tattoo and you want to cover the area again, it is important that you give the graft time to heal for at least 2yrs and then you can have a tattoo over the graft.

If you have had a melanoma, do not tattoo over the graft.

Local anaesthetic, which means you are awake during surgery

A local anaesthetic can last up to a couple of hours before it begins to wear off. There are no restrictions to driving or flying after a local anaesthetic, however, please note that if you have a dressing in place that restricts your vision or restricts movement to your arm/leg, you may be advised not to drive back home, and you may need to check with your insurance going forward.

General anaesthetic, which means you are asleep during surgery

The effects of general anaesthetic can stay in your system for up to 48 hours. It can make you feel lightheaded and tired. You may also feel nauseas which can lead to vomiting. It's important you have a responsible adult with you for the first 24 hours and you should not do the following for 48 hours :

- Drive a car, bicycle or any form of motorised transport.
- Drink alcohol or smoke
- Operate machinery or electrical appliances.
- Make any important decisions or sign any legal documents.
- Make yourself inaccessible to the person looking after you i.e. locking bathroom door
- Eat heavy or greasy meals which could result in nausea.

It is important to rest, eat light meals and drink plenty of water.

If you are unhappy with the appearance of your skin graft, we will be happy to discuss further.

Contacts:

Dressings - Jenny Green 07385416169

Secretaries - Monday – Friday 9am - 5pm
01484 355397
01484 347313

Urgent, out of hours & weekends go to GP or A&E

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

Jenifer Green - Clinical Nurse Specialist in Plastics
Surgical Out Patients
Huddersfield Royal Infirmary and Calderdale Royal Hospital

Mobile: 07385416169

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਪ੍ਰਾਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਉਪਰੋਕਤ ਵਿਭਾਗ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور فارمیٹ یا زبان میں درکار ہوں، تو برائے مہربانی مندرجہ بالا شعبے میں ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

"إذا احتجت الحصول على هذه المعلومة بشكل مغاير أو مترجمة إلى لغة مختلفة فيرجى منك الاتصال بالقسم المذكور أعلاه"