



Scar massage following breast cancer surgery

This leaflet outlines the benefits of scar massage following breast cancer surgery, and explains how to do it. If you have any concerns or questions, speak to one of the breast care nurses.

What is a scar?

Scars are fibrous tissues that forms on the skin after a wound, injury to the surface of the skin or as a result of surgery. Your body makes fibres out of collagen to strengthen the scar. The longer a wound takes to heal or the more damaged the skin, the more the scar will be thicker and less flexible.

Scar tissue is never as good as the skin or tissue it replaces. Your age and skin type can also affect how a scar forms and behaves.

Adhesions are bands of scar tissue that anchor and support the wound. These bind together all the tissue that they come into contact with. You can think of adhesions as internal scar tissue.

Initially, scars may look flat and whitish in colour, but they can change and become hard, raised and thick. They may also stick to underlying tissue, itch or become sensitive to the touch.

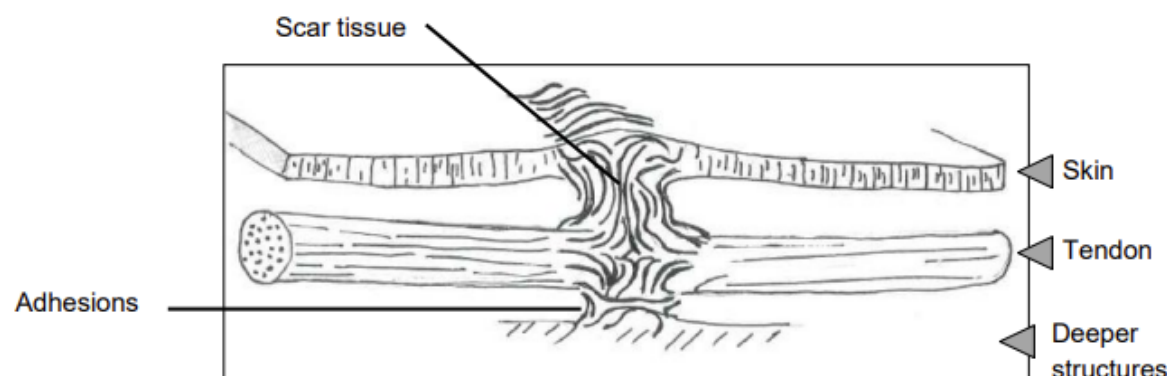


Image source: St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Why massage scars?

Scar massage is a way of softening and flattening scars. It can stop scar tissue build up and make scars less noticeable, increase their mobility and make them less sensitive.

Your scar or scars will continue to grow and change for about 12-18 months, so the earlier and more regularly you massage your scar, the less the chance of long term problems

When should I start scar massage after surgery?

It is important that you only start massaging your scar once it is healed enough. This should be after about two weeks. **You should not massage your scar if you still have stitches or if the scar has a scab on it.** If you are having radiotherapy, the radiography team will ask you to apply moisturiser daily. Scar massage during radiotherapy may be uncomfortable so if you are unsure, please contact the breast care nurses.

How to massage your scar(s)

- Use an unperfumed moisturising cream or lotion, such as E45, Nivea or Vaseline Intensive Care.
- Aim to massage the scar and any tight or hard areas close to the scar for 2-3 minutes between 2-3 times a day. After a few days, increase to massaging for 5-10 minutes, 2-3 times a day.
- The massage needs to be deep and firm to the point that the skin blanches (goes white). However, it should not be overly painful.
- With the tips of two or more fingers, gently apply pressure to the scar and surrounding area while slowly and firmly moving your fingers in one of three directions:
 1. In small circles while moving along the length of the scar. The circumference of the circles should encompass the skin on either side of the scar.
 2. Back and forth along the length of the scar (vertical).
 3. From one side of the scar to the other (horizontal), slowly moving along the length so the whole of the scar and its surrounding tissue has been massaged.

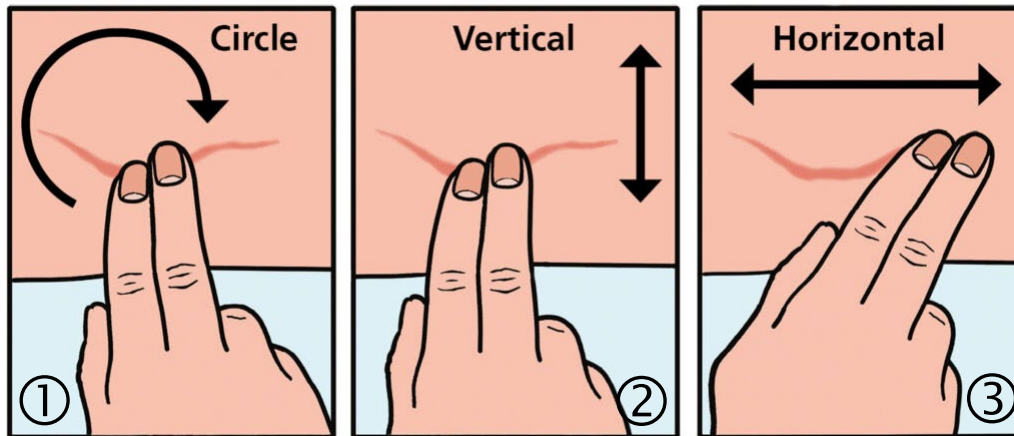


Image source: The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

It may take several months to achieve a flat, mobile and non-sensitive scar and every patient heals differently. If you feel there is no improvement despite the massage, contact the breast care nurses for further advice.

When should I stop massaging?

Stop massaging and contact your GP if you experience any of the following:

- Redness
- Bleeding
- Scar feels warmer than the skin around it
- More pain than usual at the site of the scar

Further information

- Our complementary therapy team, My Cancer My Choices, offers a scar massage service and accept self-referrals via the following website <https://mycancermymychoices.org>
- If you have been invited to a 'Moving forward: Recovery information session', we would encourage you to attend. This is a virtual online session that features scar massage.
- <https://breastcancernow.org/about-us/blogs/caring-for-scars-after-breast-cancer-surgery/>

Useful contact details

Breast Care Nurses 0118 322 7420 breastcarenurses@royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Breast Unit Clinical Admin Team (CAT3) 0118 322 6890 or email rbb-tr.cat3@nhs.net

Patient Advice and Liaison Service 0118 322 8338 PALS@royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Breast Cancer Now 0808 800 6000 <https://breastcancernow.org/>

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Breast Unit. March 2025.

Next review due: March 2027.