

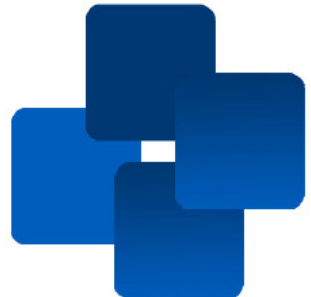
Care of your skin graft and donor site

Department of Plastic Surgery
Directorate of Surgery



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Care of your skin graft and donor site

What is a skin graft?

A skin graft is living tissue removed from one area of the body (donor site) to another area of the body. This may be done under either local or general anaesthetic. Your plastic surgeon will explain what will be involved with your particular surgery.

Types of skin graft

- Split skin graft (SSG) - the most common type of skin graft. This uses the epidermis and upper layers of the dermis.
- Full thickness grafts (FTG) - this uses the full thickness of the epidermis and the dermis, usually used for smaller grafts such as the face.
- Composite grafts - use tissues such as skin and cartilage and may be used for reconstruction, for example in the nose. Donor sites can be an area such as the ear.

Benefits of having a skin graft

- Restores body skin cover
- Reconstructs damaged tissue on body

What does the procedure normally involve?

A piece of skin taken from another area of the body is overlaid onto a wound / defect and may be stitched in place or secured with a pressure dressing. This will remain in place for up to five days whilst the new skin starts to bond.

The area where the skin is taken (the donor site) will usually heal within ten to fourteen days, but may be very sore and may weep for a few days. Although the thigh is one of the most common donor sites, other areas may also be used.

Although the donor site does not normally have stitches, any stitches in the donor site are usually dissolvable. A protective dressing will be put over the donor site.

Care of the skin graft and donor site

If you are on the ward, your plastic surgery nurse will look after your dressings.

The type of dressings will depend on the surgery you have had and your consultant's instructions. It may be a simple light gauze and crepe bandage or a thicker elastic bandage. Other types of pressure dressings on the face may look rather strange and may be stitched to the wound. Please keep your dressing clean and dry.

If the graft is on your leg, you will need to gradually increase the amount of walking you do, according to the instructions from your doctor and physiotherapist. You should elevate your leg when you are resting to prevent swelling. If the graft is on your arm, try to rest it on a pillow. At night you should rest the arm or leg on a pillow whilst you sleep.

- Avoid picking or pulling the dressing
- Avoid pain killers with aspirin before surgery. If you are taking aspirin for another medical reason, continue to do so
- Paracetamol or codeine is usually sufficient to manage the discomfort
- Avoid smoky environments and smoking as this will delay healing

Washing - You are advised not to have a bath for two weeks after your graft. For the following two weeks please do not soak your skin graft in the bath for more than five minutes. You may use a mild soap and rinse well, patting the graft dry gently with a soft towel. Once your graft has healed you may bath and shower normally.

Massage - Your doctor or nurse will explain that this should be done daily after the dressing has been removed. It is important to soften the healed skin graft and donor site and massage helps to reduce redness. E45 cream, aqueous cream and Nivea are good creams to use as they are non-perfumed. Wash site before massaging as cream may build up in the graft. Please ask the nursing staff for a scar massage information sheet.

Sports - Please wait until your six week check up before resuming any sporting activity. Your consultant will advise you when you can return to sport.

Sunbathing - It is important to completely block the sun from the graft area using either clothing, a hat or high factor sun block.

What happens next?

If you are an outpatient or have been discharged, a Dressing Clinic or District Nurse appointment should be arranged.

This is usually followed by an outpatient appointment with the surgical team, six weeks after your operation.

Risks of the procedure

- The skin graft may fail
- There may be poor or delayed healing
- The graft or donor site may become infected
- You may have a poor cosmetic result

We hope this information is helpful to you.

If you have any suggestions which may improve this leaflet, or if there is any part of the procedure you are worried about, please tell a member of staff.

We would like to work with all of our patients to offer the highest standards of information for this procedure.

Contact details -

Dressing Clinic

(8am - 4pm, Monday - Friday)

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