

## Burn scar management

### Development of hypertrophic scars

- Scarring post a burn injury can impact on a person's function, cosmetic appearance and comfort levels, which all influence quality of life.
- An injury taking longer than 14 days to heal conservatively or requires a graft has an increased risk of scarring.
- Hypertrophic scars develop as a result of a build-up of collagen. Usually dark pink/red or purple in colour, are raised above the level of undamaged skin, are thickened and hard when touched. Under pressure, the scar will blanch to a lighter colour, and return to its darker colour once the pressure is released.
- Hypertrophic scars generally increase in activity in the first 6 months, where they may fluctuate in their colour, height and pliability. Scars can continue to remain active for up to 2 years, which is referred to as *maturing*. Conservative treatment methods: massage, pressure therapy and silicone most effectively maximise outcome during this active timeframe.

### Pigmentation

- Changes in skin colour (pigmentation) post a burn injury can occur in the presence **or** absence of scarring. Genetics and skin colour can impact a person's skin pigmentation.
- **Hypo**pigmentation is when the affected skin is lighter than the overall skin colour
- **Hyper**pigmentation is when the skin colour is darker.
- Time and sun protection are currently the only two conservative methods for managing changes in pigmentation. It can take many months for skin colour to settle.

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## Pain and Itch

- Scars can cause pain and itch.
- Itch, is common following a burn injury, especially with the development of hypertrophic scars. It can start as early as a few weeks post the injury, and can continue long term.
- People who experience this, often talk of the itch worsening:
  - At night time
  - During or after exercise
  - Hot temperatures
- Pharmacological treatments are generally commenced at the VABS, and patients are linked in with their GPs for ongoing management and weaning of medications.
- Conservative methods of itch management include massage, moisturiser, compression therapy and silicone. Please see individual factsheets on this website.

## Scar maturation

- A *mature* scar has ceased physiologically remodelling. Conservative efforts to treat the scar are no longer effective.
- Once a scar is mature, the skin stays the same colour, thickness and depth when the treatment modality is removed (silicone, garments). Blanching no longer occurs.
- It is recommended a client weans their scar management treatments as opposed to completely removing them in one go. Initially, removing the therapies during the day time is advised so clients can monitor if any changes to their scar are occurring.
- If, however, after a period of time (minutes to hours), people find their scars hardening, getting raised and more red, it is most likely that the scar is still active and maturing... so ongoing treatment should be continued.

### Contact Details

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