

Optimal Wound Care – Skin Grafts

What you need to know to ensure graft survival and minimize scarring

Skin grafting is a common technique for wound closure whereby skin is ‘harvested’ from one site, and moved to another. Skin grafts undergo distinct phases as they heal. Each of these phases, including how to best treat a newly grafted area, is outlined in this document to help ensure a nicely healed wound and to minimize unsightly scarring.

Poor nutritional status, smoking, over-activity causing movement over the graft site, some medications and the presence of infection and bleeding under the skin graft can adversely effect the chance of skin graft survival.

Day 0 – 5 to 7

For the first two days after skin grafting, survival of the skin graft relies on the passive diffusion of oxygen nutrients into the graft. This is termed ‘plasmatic imbibition’. From day 3-5, ‘inosculation’ occurs, whereby small blood vessels in the graft begin to connect with those of the wound bed. For this reason, shearing of the dressing over the graft site must be avoided and a ‘bolster’ dressing is sutured over the graft. This dressing is to remain in-tact until between day 5 and 7 following the procedure. An appointment will be scheduled for you to have the bolster removed by a member of our expert nursing team.

Do

- Leave your dressing intact
- Return as scheduled for removal of the bolster dressing

Do Not

- Get the bolster dressing wet
- Touch, massage or sleep on the newly grafted areas

Day 5/7 – 12 to 14

Around day 5 or 7, your bolster dressing will be removed and the graft site will be dressed with non-medicated paraffin-impregnated gauze (Jelonet) and a sterile bandage. You will need to purchase supplies and dress your wound daily for the next 7 days, unless home care arrangements have been made. Even if you have homecare ordered, you will still be required to purchase the following supplies. For supplies, you will need the following:

- Sterile saline
- Clean tweezers and scissors – we recommend boiling these in water for 10 mins first
- Q-tips
- Medical tape – can be purchased at any drugstore
- Telfa gauze or other non-stick dressing – this can be purchased at any drugstore

- Jelonet – this is not available at all pharmacies. It can be purchased from Kenron Pharmacy located in the building directly behind the Calgary Mohs Surgery Centre. It is located in the Rockyview Health Centre #110, 1011 Glenmore Trail SW. It can also be purchased at both Co-Op Home Health Care Stores in Calgary: 9309 McLeod Trail or 4938 Richmond Road SW.

Do

- Cleanse the edges of the graft with Q-tips soaked with sterile saline. Do not touch the graft itself
- With clean scissors, cut a piece of Jelonet just large enough to cover the skin graft
- Apply a small piece of telfa or other non-stick dressing over the Jelonet and secure with medical tape

Do Not

- Touch the centre of the skin graft
- Use hydrogen peroxide
- Touch, massage or sleep on the area
- Walk long distances, run, etc.
- Get the graft wet

Day 12/14 - 21

Assuming adequate skin graft take, you may begin to shower normally around Day 14. Ensure that the water only contacts the skin graft indirectly (i.e. the graft can get wet but do not allow direct water pressure on the graft). Also, the graft may now be left open to air, where possible. For cleansing you may now discontinue the use of saline and use a gentle cleanser and non-sterile water.

Do

- Shower (avoid direct water pressure on the graft)
- Cleanse daily with gentle cleanser (ie. Gentle Cleanser – SkinCeuticals)
- Apply a good moisturizer around the graft (ie. Epidermal Repair – SkinCeuticals)
- May leave open to air

Do Not

- Continue with Jelonet or anti-bacterial ointment
- Touch, massage or sleep on the area
- Walk long distances, run, etc.

Gentle Cleanser by SkinCeuticals is formulated for dry, sensitive or traumatized skin. It removes excess impurities and oil without drying the skin. It is non-irritating and gentle enough to be used several times a day. It can be purchased at our office location.

Ideal for use after plastic surgery or dermatologic procedures, Epidermal Repair by SkinCeuticals is formulated to help repair compromised skin by facilitating the rapid restoration of its barrier function. It helps to relieve and rehabilitate sensitive skin while diminishing redness due to inflammation. It can be purchased at our office location.

Day 21 – 1 Year

By 3 weeks, the skin graft should start to improve in both colour and contour. Over time, it will change from a semi-transparent state to a colour more similar to that of your native skin. The resultant scar will continue to 'mature' over the next 1-2 years, as your wound continues to remodel and strengthen. Until then, the scar around the graft may continue to look red and/or raised. Once the graft site is mature, the colour of the graft may look lighter than that of the surrounding skin.

Scarring is inevitable. Fortunately however, you can often influence the extent of the scar. Frequent massage facilitates equilibration of deposited collagen and re-alignment of the collagen fibers within the scar. Silicone helps to maintain a barrier, which both raises the temperature of the scar as well as increases the oxygen tension around it, thus providing an optimal environment for scar remodeling.

Do

- Continue to cleanse area daily
- Continue to use a good moisturizer daily
- Massage frequently
- Use silicone sheeting/gel as directed (which can be purchased at our office)
- Use a high quality sunscreen/UV protection (which can be purchased at our office)

Do Not

- Use Vitamin E or other non-proven scar treatments

Scar-Heal gel, sheeting and creams are silicone-containing, professional-grade products that help to moisturize, raise the temperature of and increase the oxygen tension within scars. The result is an optimal environment for wound care healing. Regular use as directed can help to neutralize scar colour and flatten raised areas.

For information on how to treat the skin graft donor site (where the skin graft was taken from), please refer to the sheet entitled “Optimal Wound Care – Normal Incisions” or “Optimal Wound Care – Dissolvable Sutures with Steri-strips”).

All products mentioned here are available for purchase at our office location: 102-47 Sunpark Drive SE or online at www.beautifulnaturalyou.ca. If you have additional questions about product, please call our office at (403) 571-3141.