

Occupational Therapy Scar Desensitisation

Information for patients, carers
and relatives



Sometimes scars can become over sensitive, which can affect how you do your day to day activities. This leaflet explains how to “desensitise” a hypersensitive scar.

Why do I need scar desensitisation?

- Following surgery, or injury, scars can become oversensitive, tender or painful to touch. This is known as hypersensitivity and unfortunately does not go away by itself.
- Hypersensitivity is caused by damage to the nerve endings due to injury of the skin.
- It can be painful and feel like tingling, shooting or burning pain, or ‘pins and needles’.
- The nerve endings in the scar continue to send pain signals to the brain after the wound has healed when there is no longer a need to protect the area.
- Not all scars are hypersensitive.

Desensitisation in everyday activities

- If you have a hypersensitive scar, it is important to continue normal activities and not be over protective of the sensitive area. For example:
- Use a flannel or towel to rub the sensitive area while having a bath or shower.
- When dressing, run the affected area over the different textures of your clothes.

Desensitisation Techniques:

For best results, carry out these techniques 3-4 times a day for approximately 10 minutes. It is important to look at the affected area whilst doing this.

1. **Massage** (as described in separate leaflet).
2. **Texture Massage** - rub the area with various textures. Start with soft materials and work up to coarser textures. For example cotton wool, felt, towelling, rough cloth, velcro.
3. **Immersion** - If your scar is on your hand or foot they can be immersed in a bowl of materials including: cotton wool, kidney beans, lentils, rice, or pasta.
4. **Percussion/Tapping** - using your hand or light object such as a pencil, lightly tap the affected area quickly for two minutes or until you notice feeling in the area changing or it starts to feel numb.
5. **Vibration** - Use an electric toothbrush to lightly apply vibration to the area. Start on an area that is not sensitive and gradually work towards the affected area.

These exercises may feel uncomfortable at first but it is important to continue with them.

Over time the pain will reduce and you will be able to experience different sensations without discomfort.

If you have any concerns regarding your scar or hypersensitivity, particularly if you are avoiding using the affected area of your body normally, please seek advice immediately from your GP or Consultant.



What did you think of your care?

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