Keloid and hypertrophic scars

Information for patients

This sheet answers common questions about keloid and hypertrophic scars. If you would like further information, or have any particular worries, please do not hesitate to ask your nurse or doctor.

In all cases, your practitioner will explain the procedure to you and answer any questions you may have.

In most cases it will be possible for a friend or relative to accompany you for all or part of the procedure. Please ask your practitioner.

What are keloid and hypertrophic scars?
Keloid and hypertrophic scars are the result of an imbalance in the production of collagen (a protein found in the human body which holds the body together) when wounds are healing. They can grow beyond the boundary of the original wound and may be painful and cause itching. The appearance of keloid scars may not improve over time.

Keloid scars can result from any type of injury to the skin, including acne, vaccination sites, piercing or surgical incision.

Anybody can get a keloid scar, although young people and those with dark skin are more prone to developing this type of scarring, particularly on the ears, chest, shoulders and back.

Hypertrophic scars are red and raised. They may be painful or cause itching. They do not extend beyond the boundary of the original wound, but may continue to thicken for up to six months.

Hypertrophic scars usually improve within 12-24 months but may cause distress because of their appearance, intense itching or restricted movement if located over a joint.

What treatment is recommended?
The treatment for keloid and hypertrophic scars involves a course of steroid injections to help soften and flatten as well as relieve the symptoms of pain or itching. The application of silicone in sheet or gel form may also be advised, to help reduce the size or restrict the growth of both keloid and hypertrophic
scars. Silicone gel and sheets are available on prescription and can be purchased from the chemist for self-application.

**Triamcinolone acetonide**
Triamcinolone acetonide is a corticosteroid. Corticosteroids, often referred to simply as steroids, are an anti-inflammatory medicine. They are man-made versions of hormones which are produced naturally by our body’s adrenal glands (two small glands that sit on top of the kidneys).

Triamcinolone acetonide is used to treat keloid or hypertrophic scars. Its effects may last several weeks or even months.

**How will this be given?**
The steroid is injected through a very fine syringe directly into the scar and very little is absorbed into the blood stream. The steroid injection can be painful. Discomfort may be reduced by the application of an ice pack for 10 minutes.

**What is the recommended dose?**
You receive triamcinolone acetonide in concentrations of 10-40 mg/ml.

**How many treatments will I need?**
Injections are repeated at four to six weekly intervals for 6 to 10 months. You will be able to continue to apply silicone gel or silicone sheets, usually from two or three days after the steroid injection. The plastic surgery team will assess your scar during the course of your treatment during follow-up appointments.

**Are there side effects?**
Side effects are minimal although complications occur in one in five cases at or around the site of the injection. These include skin atrophy (decrease in size/wasting), hypopigmentation (lightening of the skin), hyperpigmentation (darkening of the skin) and telangiectasia (small dilated blood vessels within the skin). If you experience any of these symptoms contact your GP and the scar management clinic on the contact number below.

**What are the alternatives to this treatment?**
The alternatives may include non-invasive methods such as psychological counselling, cosmetic skin camouflage and pressure garments, or invasive methods such as surgical excision, radiotherapy, laser therapy or cryotherapy. If your scar does not respond to the recommended treatment an appointment will be made for you to see your consultant plastic surgeon to discuss alternative treatment options.
Consent
Before carrying out any procedure or treatment, we will seek your consent. Staff will explain the procedure or treatment to you, along with the associated risks, benefits and alternatives before they ask you for your consent. If you have any questions about your care, or any concerns, please do not hesitate to ask for more information.

Useful contacts
Plastic surgery out-patient scar management clinic, clinic 4: 020 7794 0500 ext 31312

For more information please visit:
NHS Choices
www.nhs.uk/Livewell/skin/Pages/Keloidscarring.aspx
www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Scars/Pages/Symptoms.aspx

If you would like a large print or audio version of this information, please ask a member of staff.

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