



Phoenix Surgical Dermatology Group
4550 E Bell Road, Building 5
Phoenix, AZ 85032
Phone: 480-666-5568
www.psdermgroup.com

AS|DS
American Society for
Dermatologic Surgery
COSMETIC AND RECONSTRUCTIVE EXPERTISE
FOR YOUR skin health and beauty™

Skin Substitute – Wound Care Instructions

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR...

■ WOUND CARE:

- **Leave the pressure dressing on for AT LEAST 48 HOURS and keep it dry.**
 - Pressure dressings are intentionally tight to decrease bleeding, swelling, and pain.
- After 2 days, to remove the pressure dressing, it is often easiest to soak it in the shower/bath to loosen the adhesive. Once removed, gently clean the area with regular soap and water. You can use baby shampoo to wash your hair for wounds on the scalp.
 - You may notice that small pieces of the skin substitute flake off with time, which is normal.
 - If your doctor placed all dissolvable sutures, you may notice some fine external (outside) stitches that have not dissolved after 10 days. If you see this, you should pull them out with a clean tweezer to avoid “train track” like scars that could form where the stitches were placed.
- **DO NOT** scrub the area, and **DO NOT** allow the shower pressure to hit the area directly.
- Apply **ONLY PLAIN PETROLATUM** generously to the surgical site **at least once daily** for at least 3 weeks or until fully healed. Try to avoid a scab from forming.
 - Wounds on the scalp and hands may require plain Vaseline for 4-6 weeks or longer.
 - Wounds on the legs may require plain Vaseline for 8-12 weeks or longer.
 - Wounds that are kept moist heal faster and leave a better scar than wounds that scab over.
 - Do NOT use any antibacterial ointment because they can cause allergic reactions.
- It is best to discuss whether to re-bandage the area with your doctor.
 - It may be okay to keep the wound open to air while at home. Please cover the wound when you leave your home as it could be exposed to dust or dirt (e.g. while outdoors).
 - If you prefer to keep the wound covered, you can cover the plain petrolatum with non-adhesive or non-stick gauze and secure it with paper tape. If on your legs, you can avoid using any tape or adhesive, and instead use a sock, stocking, or elasticized wrap to keep the gauze in place.
- **Always practice good hand hygiene** → wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before changing the dressing or touching your wound to apply the plain petrolatum. You can also consider using disposable gloves while performing wound care.

■ PAIN:

- Apply **ice packs** for at least 5-10 minutes out of every waking hour for 1-2 days after surgery directly over the bandage to reduce swelling and pain. You do not need to apply ice packs while sleeping.
- **Elevate** the surgical site as much as possible to minimize swelling.
 - If you had surgery on your head or neck, relaxing in a recliner or sleeping with extra pillows to prop you up may be helpful.
 - If you had surgery on an arm or hand, you can consider using a sling to help.
 - If you had surgery on a leg, in addition to elevation, your doctor may recommend *compression stockings* when you are on your feet to help.
- For pain/discomfort, we recommend **acetaminophen** or ibuprofen.
 - You may take up to 2 extra strength acetaminophen (1000 mg) and repeat every 8 hours. If you need pain relief in between, you can take 2 ibuprofen tablets (400 mg) and repeat every 6 hours.
 - If your doctor has given you a prescription pain medication, it may already contain acetaminophen and additional acetaminophen should not be taken.
 - **Do not exceed 3000mg of acetaminophen or 2400mg of ibuprofen in a 24-hour period!**
- For any non-resolving pain, contact your doctor.

■ OPTIMAL HEALING:

- Avoid ANY strenuous activity (i.e. heavy lifting, bending over, or exercise) for at least two days to minimize bleeding risk.
 - Strenuous activity includes running, weightlifting, biking, yoga, elliptical, rowing, & stretching.
- Avoid alcohol for 2 days as this can thin your blood and cause bleeding.
- Avoid smoking for at least 3 weeks as it leads to poor wound healing. It is best to stop smoking overall.

WHAT SHOULD YOU EXPECT...

■ INITIALLY:

- **Bruising, swelling, and some pain** are expected after surgery. These will typically resolve in 1-2 weeks. Wounds on the hands, legs, and feet may take even longer to improve.
 - The more active you are, the more the wound is likely to swell and cause pain.
 - Swelling and discomfort are especially common for healing wounds on the hands and legs as swelling tends to pool in these areas because of gravity.
- Your wound may feel **tight, itchy or numb**. This should gradually improve over several months.
- You may notice small amounts of clear or golden-tinged drainage from the wound until the wound is fully healed. This drainage is normal from the healing tissue and from any residual swelling.
- The surface of the skin substitute may look crusty with dry blood. DO NOT try to remove any part of this scab/crust. Keep the wound MOIST with plain petrolatum. Slowly, pieces of the skin substitute will flake off. You may notice that the base of the wound is pink and yellow and bumpy; this is normal, and please do not try to scrub off. Eventually, over 6-12 weeks, the wound will appear skin-colored.

■ LONG-TERM:

- In terms of your final scar, everyone is different and follows a different time course of wound healing. It may take up to **6-12 months to see what the final scar** will look like.
- If you have any questions/concerns, discuss with your doctor. He/she may make some recommendations to help with the final scar appearance.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU EXPERIENCE...

■ BLEEDING

- The pressure dressing over your wound helps to stop bleeding. Any bleeding that you notice can usually easily be stopped with direct firm pressure. DO NOT remove the dressing, elevate the site, and apply **constant pressure** over the dressing for 20 minutes without checking.
- If the pressure dressing becomes completely saturated with blood or if you experience active bleeding that does not resolve with 20 minutes of pressure, **call our office immediately**.

■ CONCERNS FOR INFECTION:

- Wounds that heal without stitches are actually less likely to become infected, as bacterial overgrowth is able to drain out of the wound and not build up.
- If you experience signs of infection such as fever, chills, sweats, increased redness, swelling, warmth, thick/yellow drainage, or worsening pain to touch, call our office immediately.
 - Some redness over and along the suture line is normal and expected.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO FOR LONG-TERM SKIN HEALTH...

- Wear sunscreen (broad spectrum for UVA & UVB coverage and SPF \geq 30), a wide-brimmed hat, and sun protective clothing to avoid future skin cancers. These also help the redness from the surgical scar fade faster.
- See your dermatologist or physician regularly for a complete skin check. Regular skin checks are important for early detection and prevention of skin cancer.