



Scar Desensitization Techniques

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After surgery or injury, scars are often temporarily tender or “hypersensitive,” and this is especially true in the hand due to the dense network of delicate nerves used for touch. The scar and the surrounding skin must get used to touch and feeling again in order to function normally and allow this tenderness to go away. Often, covering or protecting the scar to avoid pain will cause the problem to persist or worsen by not allowing those nerves to re-learn normal sensations.

Fortunately you can gently and safely make your wound less tender by utilizing the below therapy exercises at home. These exercises can usually be started 2-3 weeks after surgery, once your stitches are out and the wound is dry. While it is normal to feel some discomfort while or shortly after performing these exercises, overall you should notice your scars becoming less sensitive with time. If the exercises are too painful, try less pressure or shorter, but more frequent, exercise sessions. If hypersensitivity continues to be a problem for you, we may also have you visit with a hand therapist if you are not already doing so.

Tapping (Percussion):

This technique makes use of our automatic reflex to ignore repetitive stimuli, similar to how you may not notice clothing after it is worn for awhile or a new scent after you have been in a room for a few minutes. Here is how to perform it:

1. Tap lightly around the area that is tender with your finger or a light object (such as a pencil or pen) quickly and lightly, 2-3 times per second.
2. After tapping around the tender area for 1-2 minutes, gradually move to the spot that is most tender.
3. Tap on the most sensitive area of the scar continuously for 3 minutes. During this time the area may begin to feel numb as it becomes harder to distinguish individual taps, and the area should become less tender.
4. Take a 1 minute break and then re-start. If another area is more tender now, focus there.
5. Try to perform a few sessions of this exercise as many times as possible per day. It may take a few hundred or thousand taps to make long-term changes to the scar sensitivity. Even though the area is tender, you are not causing damage or hurting your surgery, so it is ok to do this exercise as often as you are able.

Scar Stretching and Massage:

Scar stretching and massage offer a number of benefits to your surgery site. In addition to helping with hypersensitivity, they help decrease the size and bulk of the scar down to that of normal skin. They also help underlying tendons or other tissue move more freely past the scar, which can improve stiffness or tightness. Scar stretching should be done first, without any moisturizing lotion

or scar gel, while scar massage does require this and so is done second. Here is how to perform them:

Scar Stretching

The goal behind scar stretching is to **STRETCH** the underlying tissue of the scar and beneath the skin, breaking up scar tissue and reintroducing the skin nerves to the sensation of skin movement.

1. Place a finger from your opposite hand in to the center of the scar. From here, your skin can be stretched near, far, left, and right.
2. Keeping the first finger in place on the scar, use a second finger to stretch the skin to the side of the scar in one direction, and then hold this for 5 seconds.
3. Relax, and then repeat the motion in another direction. Continue until you have stretched the skin in all 4 directions.
4. Repeat this process along the length of the scar 5-10 times. Increase the force and pressure of the stretch with each repetition as your symptoms allow. Perform this process as many times per day as you can.

Scar Massage

The goal behind scar massage is to help break up scar tissue and reintroduce the skin nerves to the sensation of deep pressure.

1. Moisten the scar with a small amount of moisturizing lotion or scar gel.
2. Run a finger from the opposite hand up and down the length of the scar with mild-to-moderate pressure. Do this for 2 minutes.
3. Relax, and then run the finger across (perpendicular to) the scar, working your way up and down the scar for another 2 minutes.
4. Lastly, work the finger up and down the scar while performing circular motions for 2 minutes.
5. Repeat this 3-5 times, gradually increasing the amount of pressure you use as your symptoms allow.