

Care of your skin graft and donor site

Department of Plastic Surgery
Information for Patients

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What is a donor site?

When an area needs to be covered with a skin graft, skin is usually moved from a donor site. A donor site is the area where a piece of skin has been taken to cover a wound on another part of the body. We often use your thigh as the donor site, but it could also be your bottom (buttocks) or upper arms.

What is a skin graft?

The moved skin is known as the skin graft. There are 2 main types of skin grafts used in Leicester's Hospitals.

- **Split thickness skin graft (STSG).** It uses the top layer of skin (epidermis) and a small part of the layer below (dermis)
- **Full thickness skin graft (FTSG).** It uses the top layer (epidermis) and the entire dermis layer.

How long will I be in hospital?

Whether you can go home the same day or whether you need to stay in hospital can be dependent on the size and location of the area grafted. This can also depend on how you are feeling after your anaesthetic, for example:

- if you are in pain.
- if you feel sick or are being sick (nausea and vomiting).
- whether you are eating and drinking normally.

If your graft is on your leg, it is important to keep the grafted leg raised up. Try not to move around too much. A nurse on the ward will talk to you about this. Sometimes we use a cast to support and protect the graft. Please ask a nurse on the ward for advice about your cast before you go home.

How is the skin graft secured?

We use stitches, staples, clips or special glue to hold the skin graft in place. The area will be covered with a sterile dressing sometimes called a 'tie', until the first dressing change. The graft is checked 5 to 7 days after the procedure.

If you are sent home before your graft check (first dressing change) you will either be given a follow up appointment before you go home or it will be sent to you in the post.

Do not adjust or remove the dressing before your appointment. This can affect how successful the skin graft is.

Follow up appointments

You will come to the Burns and Plastics Treatment Centre for follow up appointments with a nurse. The clinic is on Level 3, Balmoral Building at Leicester Royal Infirmary.

If you have any concerns, are unwell or cannot attend the appointment please contact us on **0116 258 5328** between the hours of 8.30am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday. We can rearrange your appointment. Out of these hours please contact the ward that you stayed on after you skin graft procedure. The nurse will look at your graft. They will give you advice about future care and appointments as needed.

Aftercare of your skin graft

Once a nurse has assessed that you no longer need a dressing, we advise you cover your healed graft with factor 50 sun cream or full sun block. This area of skin is sensitive and more likely to burn in the sun. You can cover the area with clothing, for example, if the graft is on your head, you can wear a hat to protect it.

Your return to work will depend on the type of job you have and where the skin graft is. We can talk about this with you before you go home and at your first graft check. This is the same for return to school for children.

Care of your donor site

During surgery we will cover the donor site with a special dressing to help slow down the oozing. It is normal for the wound to weep fluid. The aim of the dressing is to:

- Absorb the fluid.
- Keep the wound clean and dry.
- Protect the 'raw' surface.
- Allow the wound to heal.

It is normal for the wound to have a slight smell from the fluid or dried blood. The dressing may also harden and become loose.

