

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 'borrowed' 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 split thickness skin graft?

The 'borrowed' skin is known as a partial or split thickness skin graft. The top layer of skin (epidermis) and a small part of the layer below the epidermis (dermis) are removed.

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, and 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.

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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How is the skin graft secured?

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

If you are discharged 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 as this can affect how successful the skin graft is.

Follow up appointments

You will be asked to attend the Burns and Plastics Dressing Clinic 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 unable to attend the appointment please contact us on 0116 258 5328 between the hours of 830am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday and 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 and give 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 as this area of skin is sensitive and more likely to burn in the sun. The area could also be covered 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 located. 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 your donor site will have been dressed 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.

When does the donor site dressing need changing?

Your donor site dressing will not be checked or changed at the same time as your graft check. The donor site is usually checked by your local GP.

The dressing usually stays in place for between 10 to 14 days after your surgery. If you have any concerns about your donor site please ask the nursing staff or the nurse at your GP surgery.

What to do if your dressing is leaking or coming off

If you notice your dressing is loose before you go home from hospital, please tell the nursing staff on the ward and they can re-pad or secure the dressing. If you are at home, please ring your GP.

Why is my donor site more painful than my graft site?

When the skin is 'taken' from the donor area, the top layer of skin is shaved from the 'borrowing' area and applied to the graft site. It is normal for the donor to be sometimes more painful than the graft site. You should take pain relief regularly, for example paracetamol. Please take pain relief at least 20 minutes before your donor site dressing change. Always follow the instructions on your discharge medication.

Aftercare of your donor site

Once your donor site dressing has been removed and is healed you will be advised to moisturise 3 to 4 times a day. You can use epimax/ E45 or any other moisturising creams.

You will notice a difference in the skin colour (pigment) on your donor site. At first it may appear bright red but over several months the area will become paler. Please do not worry as this is normal and gradually over time, the colour will change back to your normal skin pigment. This may however take up to 2 years.

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

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