

# MASSAGE FOR YOUR ABDOMINAL SCAR

How to get your abdominal scar to look, feel, and move more normally in 15 minutes per day.

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# Massage for your Abdominal Scar

## Do You Have Discomfort Around Your Surgical Scar?

Many women experience discomfort from their surgical scar even after the scar is healed and looks normal. Often, anything that brushes up against the scar makes it feel uncomfortable. The scar can also feel sore when wearing certain clothing. In addition, women may feel as if their abdominal muscles do not work how they used to. All of these problems may be caused by restricted mobility of the scar. The restricted movement of the scar is called an adhesion<sup>1</sup>.

## Can Adhesions Be Improved?

Yes they can! Scar massage is one way to break up adhesions after surgery<sup>2</sup>. Scar massage is different from other forms of massage. Scar massage happens just around and over the scar in order to stretch the scar and bring back normal movement.

It is a common practice for patients to receive scar massage after orthopedic surgeries to knees, shoulders, or hips<sup>3,4</sup>. Increasingly, self-applied scar massage is being taught to patients after abdominal surgery. In my practice, I teach women to perform scar massage so that they can improve their ability to use their abdominal muscles. This happens because the movement gained with scar massage improves muscle function, reduces pain, and makes it easier to exercise and strengthen abdominal muscles.

In addition, studies show that stretching scars can prevent excessive scarring<sup>5,6</sup>. This research may explain why patients who have had scar massage experience better scar healing and feel less pain. In addition, several clinical studies show that scar massage can help scars become less noticeable<sup>7,8,9</sup>.

## Is Scar Massage For Me?

- Have you had a C-section in the last two years?
- Have you had abdominal surgery in the last two years?
- Do you want your abdomen to feel more like it did before your surgery?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then taking special steps to care for your scar can substantially help your scar to look and feel better.

There are two stages for massage of abdominal scars:

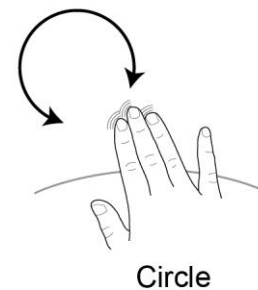
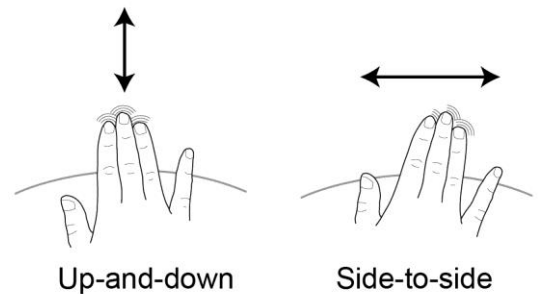
- **Stage One** involves stretching and desensitizing the skin around the scar.
- **Stage Two** involves stretching and desensitizing the skin directly on/ over the scar.

## Stage 1: Skin Stretching and Desensitization Around the Scar

You can begin Stage One six weeks after your surgery or later. You should do both of the following activities for maximum benefit. Always have clean hands with little to no lotion.

### Skin Stretching Directions:

1. Place your fingers 2 to 3 inches from your scar.
2. Stretch the skin around the scar area by moving your fingers **up and down**. Make up-and-down motions around the entire scar.
3. Stretch the skin around the scar area by moving your fingers **side to side**. Make side-to-side motions around the entire scar.
4. Stretch the skin by making **circles** above and below the scar in a **clockwise** and **counterclockwise** direction.
5. Massage completely around the scar with each of these three movements 5 to 10 times.



### Tips:

- Try applying different depths of pressure with your fingertips depending on your comfort level.
- You may feel a pull or light burning when you are stretching the skin around the scar during these activities.

If you feel an area that does not move easily, or is extra sensitive, do a few more skin stretches over that area.

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*sk. by Katy*

### Desensitization to Around the Scar-Directions:

1. Use a wet hand towel or wash cloth to make a loop around the scar first with **up and down**, then **side-to-side**, and finally in **circles** (as in the patterns for skin stretching above).
2. Make five loops around the scar with each of the different movement patterns.
3. Do this **daily** after bathing until there is no sensitivity to touching the scar.

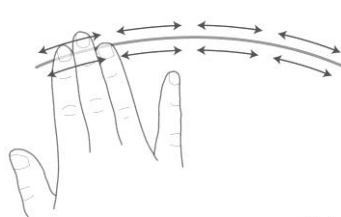
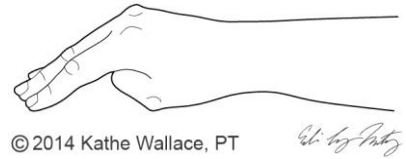
## Stage two: DIRECT Scar Stretching and Desensitization

You can begin Stage Two twelve weeks after your surgery or later. Set aside 5 to 10 minutes for each session of Direct Scar Massage and Skin Lift and Roll.

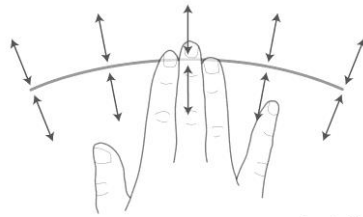
### Direct Scar Massage

Directions:

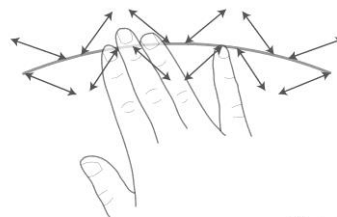
1. Hold the pads of two or three fingers together. The fingers should be slightly arched, as in the picture to the right.
2. Place the pads of your fingers directly on one end of the scar.
3. Stretch the scar by pushing your fingers about half an inch in one direction as indicated by the black arrow. Hold the scar stretched for 5 to 15 seconds.
4. Now stretch the scar opposite to the direction step 3. Hold the scar stretched for 5 to 15 seconds.
5. Move over to the next area of your scar and repeat the scar stretches as above. Work your way along the entire length of the scar.
6. Repeat 5 to 10 passes along the scar.



Side to side



Up and down

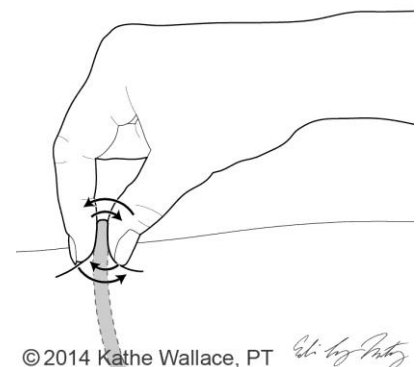


Diagonal

### Scar Lift and Roll

Directions:

1. Pick up the scar between your index finger and thumb.
2. Roll the scar between your fingers for 5 to 15 seconds.
3. Move along the scar and repeat until you have massaged the entire length of the scar.



Gradually progress towards using firmer pressure when doing Direct Scar Massage and Scar Lift and Roll for maximum benefit.

## General Scar information

- For the first few weeks after surgery, it is normal for a scar to appear pink or red and slightly raised. However, scars should not cause excessive discomfort or restriction of activity after the first few weeks. Call your healthcare provider if something does not seem right to you.
- As the scar heals over a two-year period, the scar should flatten into a smooth white line.
- Scars usually itch as they heal and they can have areas of numbness.
- Minor discomfort, such as burning or tenderness, is common during scar massage.
- Using lotion can make it harder to move the scar, which is why it is not recommended to use lotion for scar massage.

Write your questions for your healthcare provider here so that you have them handy when you come back to visit:

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