

Skin Grafts and Donor Site Care

Patient Information – Plastic Surgery Clinic

What is a Skin Graft?

A skin graft is a paper-thin shaving of skin taken from one part of your body (donor site) to put on an area where a lesion has been removed to facilitate healing. It is named a 'Split Skin Graft' (SSG) because the skin to be transferred is not the full thickness of the skin. Alternatively, a 'Full Thickness Skin Graft' (FTSG) may be used for areas on the face or hands.

Skin Graft Dressing Instructions

A dressing is placed over the graft and usually left in place for five days – please leave this dressing in place. After five days the graft is inspected; stitches or staples are removed and any overlapping graft on good skin is trimmed away. (You will be sent an appointment for this). The dressing change can be a slightly uncomfortable procedure but is not usually painful.

Paracetamol or other mild pain relief can be taken about an hour before your appointment, if you feel it is necessary.

For a Graft on the leg:

Rest and put your leg up on a stool or a sofa as much as possible during the first 5-7 days. This will further enhance the 'take' of your graft, help to prevent your limb from swelling and assist with blood circulation and healing.

If your graft is below the knee, you may be given support stockings (tubigrip) to wear to support your graft. These need to be a firm fit from your toes to just below your knee.

Do not fold over, roll or shorten your tubigrip – this can restrict circulation and cause swelling.

For a Graft on the Hand or Lower arm:

Wear a sling during the day and keep your hand/arm elevated on pillows at rest.

Bathing or Showering

- If you have a graft to your leg, hand or arm, wear a plastic bag over the dressings secured with tape or a crepe bandage to prevent the dressings getting wet.
- If you have a graft on your face, neck or anywhere on your upper body, do not get the dressings wet.

What is a Donor Site?

A donor site is the raw area or suture line that is left when a piece of skin is removed to use as a skin graft. Some smaller donor sites can be sutured closed — the suture line will be covered by a Mefix dressing (white tape), please do not remove this.

A larger donor site is like a graze and usually takes up to two weeks to heal. The most common donor site is the thigh or arm, but skin can be taken from other areas. A Mefix dressing (white tape) is applied directly

onto a larger donor site and then a thick gauze pad is bandaged or taped on. This dressing provides a protective environment to prevent entry of bacteria and to apply pressure on to the fresh donor site to slow and contain any bleeding.

Donor Site Dressing Instructions

- Two to three days after your procedure, please remove the gauze pad from your donor site (this will be bandaged or taped on). Do not remove the Mefix dressing (white tape) which is covering the raw surface of the skin.
- You can then wash or shower the donor site each day and pat the donor site dry with a clean towel.
- Some bleeding may continue. Apply a pad, for a few days if the donor site bleeds.
- If the Mefix becomes loose or lifts off the donor site and the wound is still raw, replace the lifted piece with a new piece of Mefix. You should have received a packet of Mefix (or Hypafix) on discharge.
- Leave the Mefix dressing on until it falls off (you can trim edges as they loosen) - this may take three or more weeks.
- Expect the donor site to be more painful than the skin graft site. This can be reduced by taking mild pain relief such as Paracetamol — take as directed.

Problems

- If any of the following problems occur, please seek medical advice or phone the Plastic Surgery Outpatient Department, Christchurch Hospital, Telephone 364 0471: Monday — Friday 8.00 am - 4.30 pm, after hours contact Ward 20. 364 0640 Ext 89201.
- The bandages / dressings become wet.
- The bandages / dressings slip off / down.
- For graft dressings only: if there is leakage or fresh blood coming through the dressing.
- The dressing smells bad.
- Your wound appears swollen, red or painful.
- You feel hot and unwell.

Follow up

- Attend Plastic Surgery Outpatient Department, Christchurch Hospital, (Phone (03) 364 0471)
When:
An appointment will be posted to you
- Dressing at GP
When:

Skin Care

Once the grafted and donor areas are fully healed, gently massage a moisturising cream into them, one or two times a day, for 2-3 months to keep them soft and supple.

Protect grafted areas and donor sites from the sun for a couple of years. Cover with cotton clothing and/or 30+ sunscreen. Avoid synthetic fabrics, e.g. nylon, as these often aggravate newly healed skin.

For more information about:

- hospital and specialist services, go to www.cdhb.health.nz or for your health and medication, go to www.healthinfo.org.nz