

# Skin Graft and Donor Sites with Alginate Dressings

## Patient Information – Plastic Surgery Clinic

### What is a Skin Graft?

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A skin graft is a paper-thin shaving of skin taken from one part of your body (donor site) to put on a wound (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

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A dressing is placed over the graft and usually left in place for five to seven days – **please keep your dressing dry and in place until you attend the Plastic Surgery Outpatients Department.** After five to seven days the graft is inspected; stitches or staples are removed, and any overlapping skin is trimmed away. The dressing change can be a slightly uncomfortable procedure. 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/Showering

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- 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?

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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. Your donor site is like a graze and will take up to two weeks to heal.

An alginate (seaweed) dressing was applied directly onto your donor site and then a thick gauze pad was bandaged or taped on. This dressing provides a protective environment to prevent entry of bacteria, assist healing, and to slow and contain any bleeding.

## Donor Site Dressing Instructions

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- The dressing used on your donor site takes time to work well. **Please keep your dressing dry and in place until you attend the Plastic Surgery Outpatients Department.** Cover your dressing with plastic when you bathe to ensure it remains dry.
- 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 these as directed on the packet.

## Problems

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If any of the following problems occur, or if you are concerned about your graft or the donor site, please seek medical advice from your GP or phone the Plastic Surgery Outpatient Department at Christchurch Hospital, telephone (03) 364-0471: Monday—Friday 8.00 am—4.30 pm:

- The bandages or dressings become wet.
- The bandages or dressings slip off or down.
- The dressing has leakage or fresh blood coming through.
- The dressing smells bad.
- The wound or the skin around it becomes red, painful or appears swollen.
- You feel hot and unwell.

## Follow up

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- Attend Plastic Surgery Outpatient Department, Christchurch Hospital (Phone (03) 364-0471)

When: .....

- Dressing at GP

When: .....

- Other follow up

Type/Who: .....

When: .....

## Skin Care

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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](http://www.cdhb.health.nz)
- your health and medication, go to [www.healthinfo.org.nz](http://www.healthinfo.org.nz)