**Scars from surgical incisions & traumatic lacerations:**

Any skin injury that's more serious than a superficial cut or scrape will leave a scar. Essentially, all traumatic lacerations requiring repair, will leave a scar. The same is true for surgical incisions. There are numerous techniques your surgeon will use to minimize or hide scars, but nevertheless, scarring may be a problem. Fortunately, many scars will fade in time. For those that don't, procedures like dermabrasion or laser resurfacing can improve them considerably. The best option, though, is prevention. Treating wounds promptly and properly has a significant effect on the scars final appearance.

**The following do's and don’ts will help you minimize scar formation:**

**THINGS YOU SHOULD NOT DO**

- Don’t swab wounds with hydrogen peroxide. The bubbles make it look like something good is happening, but hydrogen peroxide is known to destroy the new skin cells that immediately begin to grow.
- Avoid treating the wound with vitamin E. Despite the common belief that vitamin E helps prevent scars, vitamin E has actually been shown to impair wound healing. In addition, up to one-third of patients develop an allergic reaction. There are other fancy and often expensive scar creams, but none of these have been shown to be any more effective than plain Vaseline petroleum jelly, and because of this, are generally best avoided.
- Don’t expose new scars to the sun. Ultraviolet rays can slow the healing process, and since they stimulate melanocytes (the cells that produce pigment), they can cause dark discoloration. When you're outdoors, either keep the scar covered by your clothing, or slather on a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher. It is important to continue doing this for a full year after the injury.

**THINGS YOU SHOULD DO**

- If non-absorbable sutures were used, be sure they are removed before they leave "track" marks or “railroad” marks. When in the head and neck region, in most cases, sutures should be removed within 5-7 days.
- Keep your wound free of scabs and crusting, which will act as a barrier to the development of new tissue. Keeping a wound covered with a dressing can help with this by increasing the amount of moisture. Allowing a fresh cut to "breathe" is an old wives’ tale that will actually delay healing by as much as 50 percent. In the head and neck area, dressings may be difficult and are not always possible.
- While it is best to avoid completely submerging a wound for at least a week, it is OK to get a wound wet 24 hours after the time it was created. Another good practice to help prevent a wound from developing crusting and scabbing, is to shower twice daily, allowing the flow of water to soften and remove any crusting that has developed. You
may also gently use a washcloth and mild soap to help remove crustling.

- Keep the affected area coated with an antibiotic ointment like Neosporin (which will prevent infection, another hindrance to healing). After a week, switch to plain Vaseline petroleum jelly, and continue using it until the wound is covered with new skin.
- Gently massage the scar once the surface is completely healed. Massage helps break down the dense bands of collagen that attach to underlying tissue. Once skin has grown over the site, begin gently massaging the area with lotion in a circular manner for 15 to 30 seconds a few times a day.
- While not always practical, consider special dressings designed to apply constant pressure with silicone sheeting. According to several studies, coverings like these help to flatten and improve scars. Products to try include: Curad Scar Therapy Cosmetic Pads, ReJuveness Pure Silicone Sheeting, Scar Fx and Syprex Scar Sheets.
- If you know that the scar isn't one you'll be able to live with, speak to your doctor early on about further options available to improve the appearance of the scar.