

## Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Please contact us if you need general information or advice about Trust services. [www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/pals](http://www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/pals)

## Large print and other languages

For this leaflet in large print, please speak to your clinical team.

For help interpreting this leaflet in other languages, please ring 020 8223 8934.

Te informacje mogą zostać na żądanie przedstawione w formatach alternatywnych, takich jak łatwy do czytania lub duża czcionka, i w różnych językach. Prosimy o kontakt pod numerem 02082238934.

Macluumaadkan waxaa lagu heli karaa qaabab kale, sida akhriska fudud ama daabacaadda wayn, oo waxaa lagu heli karaa luqaddo kale, marka la codsado. Fadlan la xidhiidh 02082238934.

এই তথ্য বিকল্প ফরম্যাটে, যেমন সহজে পড়া যায় অথবা বড় ফন্ট এবং আপনার অনুব্রাটে বিকল্প ভাষায় পাওয়া যেতে পারে। অনুগ্রহপূর্বক যোগাযোগ করুন 02082238934।

Bu bilgiler, okuması kolay veya büyük baskılar gibi alternatif biçimlerde ve talep üzerine alternatif dillerde de sunulabilir. İrtibat için lütfen 02082238934 numaralı telefondan ulaşın.

اس معلومات کو متبادل شکل، جیسے، پڑھنے میں آسان یا بڑے حروف، میں دستیاب کرایا جاسکتا ہے، اور درخواست کرنے پر اسے متبادل زبان میں بھی دستیاب کرایا جاسکتا ہے۔ براہ مہربانی 02082238934 پر رابطہ کریں۔

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**Barts Health**  
NHS Trust

Patient information

## Having a skin graft

**It is important that you read and understand the information contained in this leaflet before you sign a consent form.**

### Department of Plastic Surgery

2nd Floor John Harrison House

Royal London Hospital

London E1 1BB

020 3594 7192 or 020 3594 7195



## What is a skin graft?

A skin graft is a piece of skin taken from part of your body to cover another area of your body. The two areas from where the skin is most easily taken are the thigh and the arm. If other areas are considered more suitable, these will be discussed with you.

The area from where the skin is taken is called the donor site. The area to where the skin is placed is called the graft site.

The main reasons for using a skin graft are to:

- Close a wound that is too big to be stitched together
- Cover a large area where skin has been lost due to burns or a traumatic injury
- Speed up the healing of a large wound

## Infection

If your graft or donor site becomes infected you might need antibiotics and your wound could take longer to heal. Sometimes an infection can lead to all or part of your skin graft failing which could mean another operation.

## Disrupted blood supply to the graft

During the first few days after the operation the blood supply to the graft is very delicate; new blood vessels grow into the graft and if these are injured the graft might fail. The area under the skin graft also needs a good supply of blood if your graft is to “take” successfully. A firm dressing can be placed over the graft area and the area may also be splinted, to minimise the risk of the graft moving and the new blood supply being disrupted.

## Scarring

Some people develop scars that can be raised and red in colour. The reasons why some people scar in this manner is not known.

settled. If you do not receive this letter within 10 days of leaving hospital or you wish to change the appointment, please contact the plastic surgery department whose contact numbers can be found on the back of this booklet.

## Contact numbers

Ward 12C 020 359 40684

Ward 12D 020 359 40715

Ward 3D 020 359 40310

## Lead Nurse for Plastic Surgery

**Daren Edwards** – 020 7377 7000 Ext 46031 / bleep 1194

[Daren.edwards@bartshealth.nhs.uk](mailto:Daren.edwards@bartshealth.nhs.uk)

## Clinical Nurse Specialist

**Siobhan Moriarty** – 07709134148 / bleep 1022

[Siobhan.moriarty@bartshealth.nhs.uk](mailto:Siobhan.moriarty@bartshealth.nhs.uk)

the graft if you continue to smoke after your operation and this risk is the same whether you smoke one cigarette or twenty. If you require help or information on stopping smoking, please speak to a member of the nursing staff.

## **Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)**

This is a blood clot in the large veins, particularly of the leg. A DVT can happen occur due to reduced mobility after an operation. Do not stay in one position for too long during your recovery and flex your feet often to reduce the risk of a DVT. You may be given injections to help prevent a clot occurring and elastic stockings to wear before and after surgery.

## **Returning to work**

Your surgeon will advise you when you will be able to return to work and resume any strenuous exercise or sports. If you need a sick certificate please tell the surgeon before you leave hospital or see your GP.

## **Wound care**

Before you leave hospital you will be given appointments to return to the plastic dressing clinic at The Royal London Hospital five to seven days after your discharge. The clinic nurses will check your wound and change your dressings as necessary. You will need dressings until the wounds have healed and the dressing clinic nurses can arrange for you to be followed up by a district nurse or GP practice nurse at home. If the wounds are very small you may be shown how to change the dressings yourself.

## **Appointments with the plastic surgeon**

You should receive a letter in the post giving you a follow-up appointment with the plastic surgeon to see how your wounds have

## **Immediately after the operation**

Staff will monitor you in the recovery area of theatre until it is clinically safe for you to return to the ward. When you are back on the ward the staff will check your wound dressings and blood pressure regularly. You may find you have a drip in your arm to replace any fluid you have lost during the operation.

Following your operation you may experience pain and swelling in your skin graft and donor site. It is normal to have some swelling, bruising and tenderness around these areas. You will be prescribed pain killers and your pain level will be regularly assessed, please tell the nursing staff if you are in pain or feel sick when you return to the ward.

## **What happens during a skin grafting operation?**

The operation will be performed using either a local or general anaesthetic. Under a local anaesthetic the area the donor site will be “frozen” so that you will feel no pain. Local anaesthetic can be used alone, so that you stay awake during the operation, or you can be given a sedative as well to help you relax and feel sleepy. For larger skin grafts a general anaesthetic is needed and you will be asleep during the whole procedure.

The length of time the operation takes and the number of days you will be in hospital afterwards varies depending upon the size of the skin graft and your general health. Your surgeon will discuss this with you before the operation.

## **After the operation**

After the operation your donor area will appear red in colour but this should fade within 12 to 18 months. The graft area will become less obvious and may reduce in size over time. The final size varies from person to person and will depend upon the type of operation and the size of the graft taken. However, you will be left with a permanent scar at both your graft and donor sites.

## Dressings

You will have a dressing over your skin graft and donor site but sometimes the surgeons might want to leave your skin graft exposed to the air. This will be discussed with you before the operation.

If your skin graft has a dressing, it will usually stay in place for between three and five days. It may be changed earlier, especially if the wound has bled through the dressing. Do not worry, this does not mean the graft has failed.

Your donor site dressing is normally left alone for 10-14 days to let the wound heal. You may be discharged from hospital with the dressing still in place. If the dressing slips or falls off we may replace it with a smaller dressing to give you more mobility.

## Back home

Before you leave hospital you will be given information on how to care for your donor and graft areas. There are several things you can do to help the healing process.

## Elevate the graft and donor areas

This will relieve any swelling you may have at these sites. For example, if your graft is on your face or head, sleep with extra pillows. If it is on your leg or foot, place your leg or foot on a foot stool when you are sitting down, or on a pillow when you are in bed. If your skin graft is on your arm or hand you will be given a sling to keep your arm raised. At night sleep with your arm or hand on a pillow.

## The risks of having a skin graft

As with any operation, there is a small risk of infection and complications.

## Infection

Please phone the ward for advice if you develop a temperature or find one or more of the following changes in your graft or donor area:

- An increase in pain and heat in the donor or graft site
- Swelling and redness
- A persistent discharge of pus

## Do not wash your donor or graft areas

Wait until they have healed or until you have been told you can wash the areas. Once you have been told to do so you can cleanse the areas using a mild soap.

## Massage your wounds

When your wounds have healed, you should begin to massage them with a bland non-perfumed cream such as E45 or Aqueous cream. This will relieve any itching and the scars will become supple and smoother.

## Avoid exposing your wounds

You should avoid exposing your wounds to strong sunlight for at least 18 months. This is because your skin graft and donor sites are very delicate and can sun burn very easily. If you cannot cover the scars you should use a very strong sun cream, at least factor 50 or above.

## Stop smoking

Smoking can seriously reduce the success of a skin graft taking and you must stop smoking for at least two weeks after your surgery, or better still permanently. Nicotine in cigarettes narrows blood vessels and this will reduce the supply to your graft. You are at risk of losing