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SCAR MASSAGE AFTER ABDOMINAL SURGERY

Begin belly massage as soon as possible after surgery. Stay at least 2-3" away from the scar until all scabs have fallen off naturally. The benefit is greatest when the skin is worked just below the pain threshold, as firmly as possible. However, it is very important to start gently, and progress slowly to deeper and stronger massage. You should never feel sharp, stabbing pain. A strong pulling sensation or a light burning sensation is okay. We recommend 5-15 minutes per day. Some people find that after showering is a more comfortable time. Using the pads of your fingers, stick to the skin. Do not slide across the skin. Do not use oil or lotion. Begin with steps #1 and 2. When the scab has fallen off and there is no seepage from the scar (at least 2 weeks), you may massage the scar directly, steps #3 through 6.

1. **CIRCLES** – make small circles in both directions, all over the abdomen, 1-2 fingers deep. You may do this massage close to the scar after the scab has fallen off.
2. **BOWEL STIMULATION** – Massage in circles with counter-clockwise motion, starting by the right hip, going up towards the ribs on the right side, across the body and down the left hip. This encourages the correct movement of gas and feces, and is especially helpful in the first weeks to release gas bubbles.
3. **DESENSITIZATION** – Use a rough, wet towel to rub across the scar in all directions. Repeat with a dry towel, if tolerated. This will help to decrease the sensitivity of the scar, and help you feel more at ease touching it.
4. **PUSH AND PULL** – Place two fingers directly on the scar and move it slowly, straight up, towards the ribs. When the skin stops moving, continue holding firm pressure on the scar for 1-2 minutes. This should be a strong pulling sensation, but should not cause sharp pain. Then push firmly down toward the pubic bone and hold again. Repeat to the left and to the right, in a similar manner. You may notice one or two directions feel especially "stuck". Spend a little more time holding in those directions, if possible, to free up the stuck tissue.
5. **SKIN-ROLLING** – Pinch the skin on either side of the scar, lifting the skin up. Start at either end and move forward and backward, rolling and raising the skin as you move. A free scar bulges upward. A stuck scar dimples inward. Try this 2-4 weeks after surgery.
6. **PLUCKING** – Put your index finger on one side of the scar, and thumb on the other side. Attempt to pick up the scar, separating it from the underlying tissue. If you can get under the scar, move your fingers slightly from side to side for 1-2 minutes. Start at either end, and work toward the center. If the skin slips out of your fingers, you may not be ready for this stage, but keep trying. Begin this 4-8 weeks after surgery.

The more often you effectively massage the scar, the more complete your recovery will be. You can make a difference by helping your scar move freely, and making the scar thinner and smaller. These exercises can be done several minutes each day, while you read, watch TV, or listen to music.

